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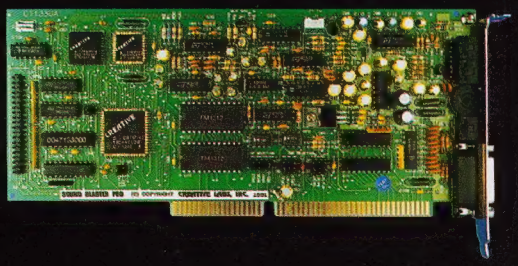

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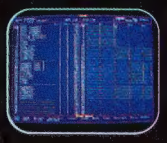

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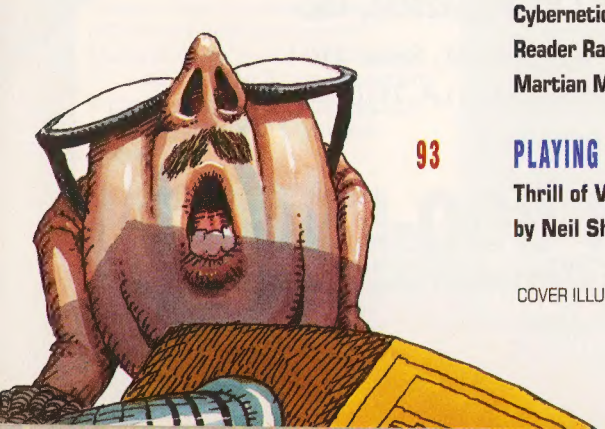

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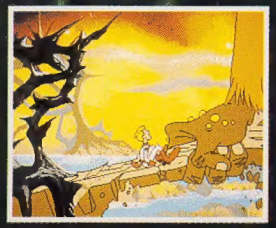

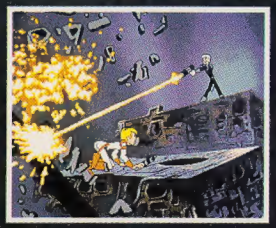

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EDITOR'S PAGE

YOU CAN RUN IT, BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE

HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE SOFTWARE PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION (OR "SPA," as we insiders call it)? Probably not, since it's an industry association whose primary responsibility is advocating the use of computer software. It's similar to the Milk Council or the Raisin Council. The SPA doesn't have a catchy slogan like "Milk . . . it does a body good" or memorable mascots such as dancing raisins singing *I Heard It Through the Grapevine*, but it's a large organization that's getting bigger every year.

The SPA tracks sales of leading software in several categories, holds an Oscar-style ceremony for the best programs of the year, and so on. Another goal of the SPA, however, is to prevent software piracy, which is estimated to cost the industry $2.5 billion a year. Over the last couple of years the SPA has gotten more aggressive and is now going after businesses that it believes have illegal software. If it suspects a business (based on tips that often come from disgruntled employees), it conducts an audit and a search (and we're talking U.S. Marshals here). The SPA has filed more than 100 suits for unlawful use of copyrighted computer software. It has also set up the Copyright Protection Fund (CPF), which includes companies such as IBM, Microsoft, Lotus, and, most recently, Apple Computer. The CPF helps pay for legal action, educational materials, ad campaigns, and more. Look for the SPA to erect billboards carrying the message "Copy Software Illegally, and You'll Get this Hardware Absolutely Free." The hardware is a pair of handcuffs.

Are you scared straight? Ready to give up on copying your favorite games for family and friends? We didn't think so. While businesses that have dozens of programs installed illegally on hard-disk drives should probably think about cleaning up their act, it's virtually impossible to police individual users. Although the SPA is also targeting operators of pirate bulletin-board systems (BBSes), you're probably safe pirating software in the privacy of your own home. But that doesn't make your actions any less illegal.

If you're a pirate who rationalizes that it's okay to copy software because it's too expensive and software publishers make too much money as it is, you're simply wrong. Microsoft and Lotus aren't the companies that make their money selling entertainment software. The majority of entertainment-software companies have fewer than 100 employees. To these companies, piracy isn't a nuisance — it's a threat to their existence. They're also the companies we count on for innovative new products. Your "criminal activities" limit their ability to provide you with your next great game. And when you wonder why games cost what they do, ask yourself how many people you know who have illegal copies of software.

My apologies for this month's sermon from the pulpit — and I was just getting to the fire-and-brimstone stuff, too — but the message is simple: If you copy software, stop. The SPA may never be able to find you, but remember, it *is* trying.

— Dan Muse, Editor in Chief

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Wizardry I

A Fantasy Role-Playing Simulation by D.W. Bradley

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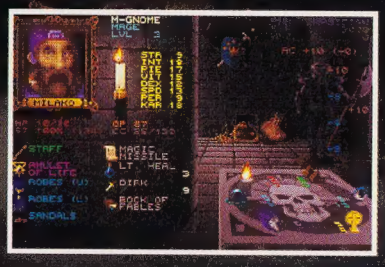

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MAILBAG

Covox Comments

The review of Covox's Sound Master II in September/October's *PCGames* (p. 74) is riddled with misinformation. The following paraphrased items refer to points in the author's review, with corresponding rebuttal:

1. SM2TEST is a nightmare; expect installation problems.

SM2TEST was designed as an installation aid, typical of many peripheral-installation standards.

2. You'll probably burn up the Sound Master II card or your computer if you don't select jumper settings for IRQs or DMA channels carefully.

You can't damage the card or computer with any jumper setting. The installation section of the manual contains a detailed schematic and instructions.

3. The internal speaker hookup doesn't work. In addition, the Sound Master II manual suggests installing this potentially hazardous wire attachment without forethought.

The author's installation should have worked. Reversing the wire does no harm to the computer or card. The instructions are detailed and concise.

4. The voice-recognition program (VMKEY) doesn't save voice templates, so the program is useless.

The author refers to Sound Master II's package, which indicates that a demo version of the VMKEY program is included. The software was changed after the packaging was printed; page 1 of the manual refers to a special note stating that a fully functional version is included. The author implies that he tried the demo program, which isn't included.

5. The author recommends avoiding Sound Master II. He implies that competing models are stereo and are proven standards in sound reproduction.

Sound Blaster and AdLib provide monaural output. With regard to standards, Covox computer-sound technology dates back to 1982. The first PC-compatible stereo-music/digital-sound card was the Covox Sound Master model 1, introduced in 1988. The AdLib monaural FM music synthesizer set a music-chip standard in 1989 with game publishers.

We're accustomed to working with reviewers, and we offer help, pointers, and suggestions as needed. Where we're at fault, we're obliged to take a beating. The author never contacted us. Ironically, he doesn't acknowledge that Sound Master II is supported by more game, music, educational, and business software titles than any other PC sound card. His article is prejudiced. Covox nonetheless remains a first-class act, with its technology spread across a wide PC market.

Mark R. Stewart
President, Covox Inc.
675 Conger Street
Eugene, OR 97402

Our Reviewer Responds

On point 1. Mr. Stewart's memory of the Sound Master II review is inaccurate. "Sound Master II setup can be a dream or a nightmare. Assuming its preset configuration creates no conflicts with other boards in your computer, everything is fine and you're ready to go in a snap. But if the SM2TEST program (included in the package) reports problems, that ease of installation turns downright ugly."

It's clear Mr. Stewart missed those first two sentences. I seldom encounter cards that leave the choice of jumper settings totally to the user. SoundBlaster Pro, which I reviewed later (November 1991, p. 60), is explicit in its suggestions.

On point 2. Inaccurate. The text states, "That's more than just frustrating, though, because the wrong combination of jumper choices can potentially fry the board, maybe even damage other components of your PC. I know from personal experience; I lost a super-VGA card not long ago because of just such a conflict."

Given the multitude of third-party cards and possibilities for conflict between any two of them, such things do happen. Mr. Stewart may think all people can read schematics, but I think recommended jumper settings are easier to follow.

On point 3. Hooking up the internal speaker ". . . should have worked"? Perhaps, but it didn't. I tried repeatedly.

On point 4. After the Sound Master II review appeared in *PCGames*, I had an interesting conversation with the manager of a Los Angeles retail chain that sells the product. He produced the additional documentation for Covox's final, completely functional VMKEY program. There's no such documentation in my copy.

When we discussed the disks, it became apparent to him that I had received a late-stage prerelease copy. That's not stated anywhere on the disks, in the program, or in the box. But my VMKEY program isn't functional; I reviewed what Covox sent me and told me was for review.

On point 5. I imply that the AdLib sound card produces a stereo *effect* by reproducing two signals simultaneously in two separate channels, one per channel. Sound Master II comes equipped to reproduce one AdLib channel. The difference is very clear in a game such as Eye of the Beholder.

Barry Brenesal
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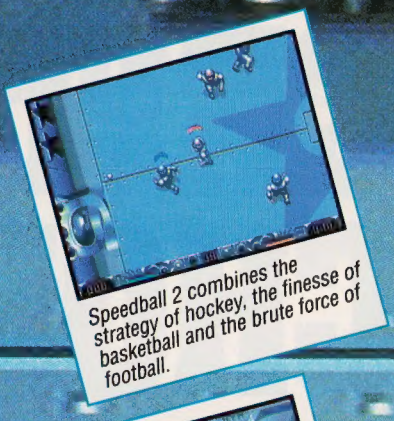
Welcome to the Terror Dome.



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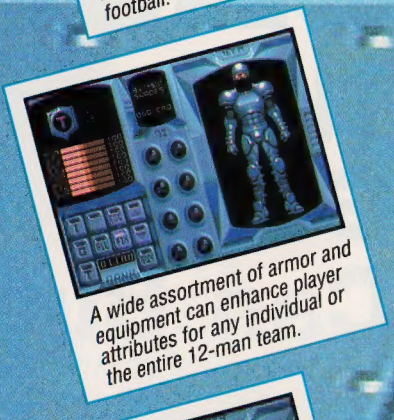
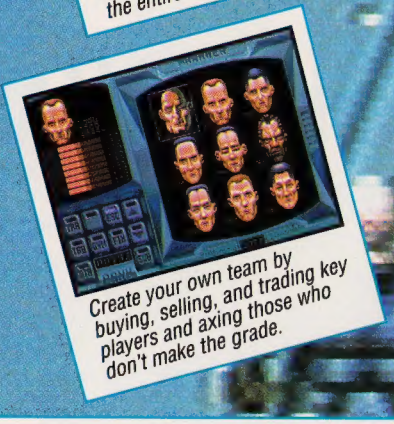


A wide assortment of armor and equipment can enhance player attributes for any individual or the entire 12-man team.



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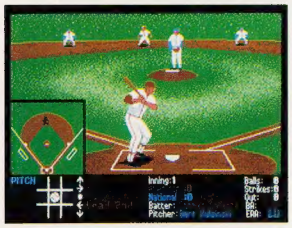

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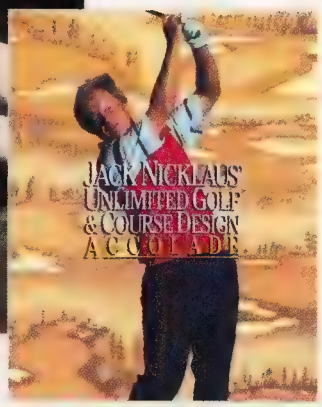

And the critics agree:

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"Even people who have never swung a club can find themselves hooked on the brilliant graphics and superb overall playability of this brilliantly realized example of what a PC game can be."
— PC Magazine, Best of 1990 Editor's Choice Award

"Designed under the direction of the Golden Bear himself, this amazing program blends exceptional graphics with realistic sound effects, giving you a real feel for the game." **— Playboy**

"You can choose from several different plots of land, lay out a rough outline of the course hole by hole on a large overhead display, then fine tune each hole individually." **— PC Games**

"Be warned, this is a serious toy . . . once you master the course designer, you'll be hooked." **— Sports Illustrated**

In conclusion: It's an "eagle on play, an ace on design." **— Golf Magazine**

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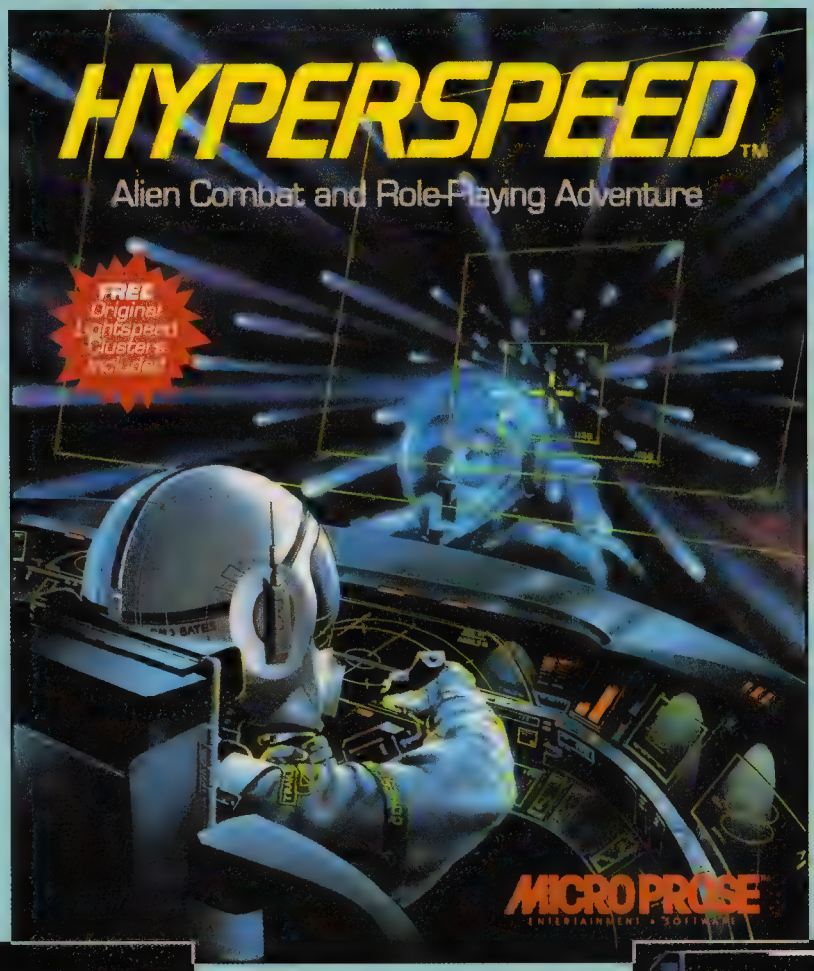
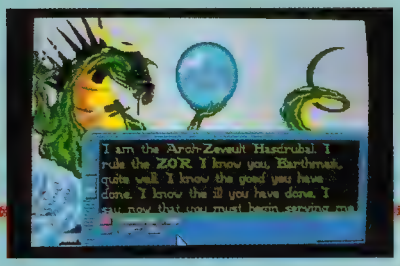
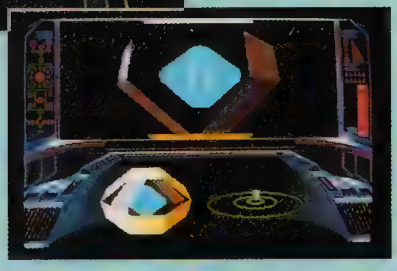
"Aliens approaching... fightercraft launched."



Look for an F-117A Stealth Fighter Demo in specially marked packages of TDK Micro Floppy Disks.
TDK.

IBM-PC screens shown.


I am the Arch-Zevault Hasdrubal. I rule the ZOR. I know you, Earthman, quite well. I know the good you have done. I know the ill you have done. I



There's no room for error when traveling faster than the speed of light, racing through star systems in a desperate search for a new world to house Mankind. But there are plenty of opportunities for mistakes. Alien races of every conceivable size, shape, temperament and sophistication seek to aid, use, corrupt or destroy you — and you don't know which.

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Hyperspeed is a dramatic enhancement of MicroProse's popular interstellar action epic, *Lightspeed*, featuring four giant star clusters to explore, an all-new animated opening sequence, more aliens and more role-playing adventure.

For IBM-PC/Tandy/compatibles. For the latest information on release dates and availabilities, call MicroProse Customer Service at 301-771-1151, 9 am to 5 pm EST, weekdays. © 1991 MicroProse Software, Inc., 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030.

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THE GAME PRESERVE

Accolade's Winter Challenge

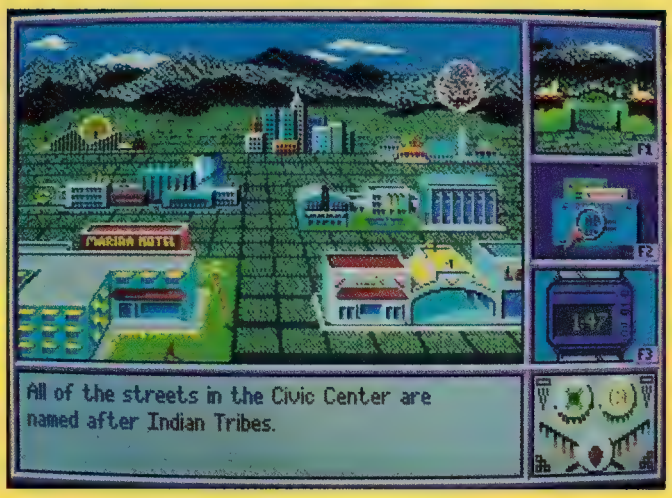
If wintertime turns your thoughts toward snowbound fun, take a look at **The Games: Winter Challenge** by Accolade (San Jose, CA). The name's a mouthful, but it's designed to coincide with the upcoming 1992 Olympics. You compete in eight classic Olympic events: bobsled, luge, biathlon, cross-country skiing, speed skating, ski jumping, the giant slalom, and the downhill. In fact, you can organize your own mini-Olympics with up to ten friends or versus nine computer players.

Accolade's planning to infuse the game with realistic sports action. You play via a unique behind-the-athlete perspective, with moving scenery that duplicates the speed and motion of each event. Also, you must learn to use the movement, strategy, and tactics of the real thing. For example, successful speed skating requires that you learn to make your on-screen competitor use the "cross-over" skating technique.

Winter Challenge also sports a sharp visual style, combining 3D polygon graphics with bit-mapped images in 256 colors. The international line-up of contestants was captured digitally from live video footage of actual athletes performing in each event. An *Instant Replay* feature lets you save your performances as training films.

The smart money says a "Summer Challenge" is also in the works. For more information, contact Accolade at (408) 985-1700.

— W.N.



Deciphering a coded message in Operation Wildlife.

Talk to the Animals

Many children and parents have learned about geography and history by chasing Carmen Sandiego across the United States and Europe, around the world, and through time. Now you, or your kids, can learn facts about mammals in **The Secret Codes of C.Y.P.H.E.R. — Operation Wildlife** ($49.95), from Tanager Software Productions (San Leandro, CA).

As a secret undercover agent for Courageous Young People in Hush-Hush Electronic Radio-telegraphy (C.Y.P.H.E.R.), you must locate the pieces to a CYPHERGRAM — a coded message — and deliver it your client. To crack that code you must stay a step ahead of your L.U.R.K. (Loathsome Underhanded Rotten Krooks) counterparts. To decipher the code, though, you must follow clues based on mammals; the game provides information on 87 mammals in five natural habitats. It also includes 1400 mammal listings in its built-in "FunCyclopedia."

Codes of C.Y.P.H.E.R. offers five optional decoder alphabets: English, American sign language, braille, Morse code, and semaphore, as well as five levels of difficulty. For more information, contact Tanager Software Productions at (415) 430-0900. **— D.M.**

Sega Kicks Off

Sega of America (Redwood City, CA) is best known for its video games, but don't count it out of the PC gaming world. **Joe Montana Football** has been on store shelves for about a year, but now Sega's repackaging the existing software and bundling a new disk with it containing six new playbooks, each with 24 offensive and 12 defensive plays.

Playbooks also carry a theme, such as long passes, short runs, and so on. PC signal callers who already own Joe Montana Football can get the new playbooks for the cost of shipping and proof of purchase.

✔ Word's out that Sega's currently programming a basketball game, too. At press time a "big name" NBA player was ready to ink the deal. (It isn't Michael Jordan.) **— W.N.**

Data East in Your Corner

The thrill of victory, the agony of a black eye — Data East (San Jose, CA) is about to step into the ring with **ABC Wide World of Sports Boxing**. This game attempts to capture all aspects of "the sweet science," from the management of fighters to the culture of the sport. Of course, you'll also engage in some vicious knuckle busting as your fighter fires

off a variety of boxing techniques, including a jab, a hook, combinations, feinting, and even clinching. Up to ten human players can compete.

But there's more to this fight game than throwing punches. You can create your own boxer by choosing a number of characteristics, down to facial features, hair color, and skin color. There's a career mode, too, in which boxers age and retire over time. If you win, you can buy new equipment and hire better managers and trainers.

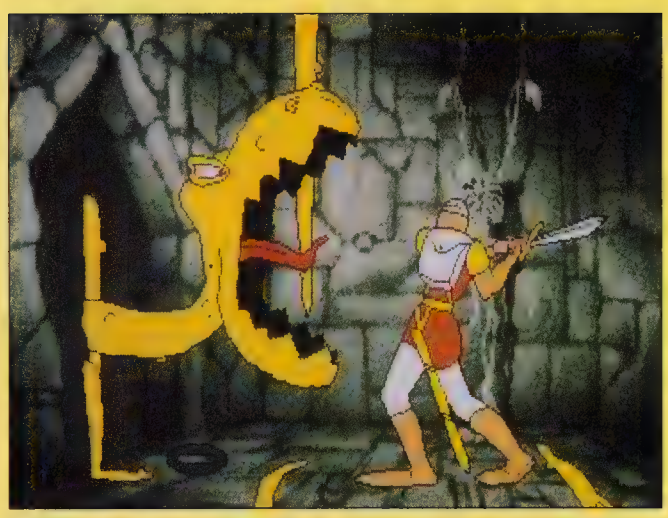
A *Boxing* magazine feature even displays complete stats for every fighter, schedules for upcoming bouts, world records, and classified ads so that you can choose your training equipment.

One-way ticket to palookaville or champ of all time — it's all in your hands. For more information, call Data East at (408) 286-7080.

— W.N.

Old Heroes, New Adventures

ReadySoft (Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada) plans to continue the adventures of some of its classic arcade laser-disc heroes. **Dragon's Lair: Escape from Singe's Castle** ($59.95) features the further adventures of Dirk the Daring as he continues his quest to rescue the voluptuous Princess Daphne. Dirk has defeated Singe the Dragon, but his travails continue, as the Evil Shapeshifter has kidnapped his friend. Expect to die violently and often.



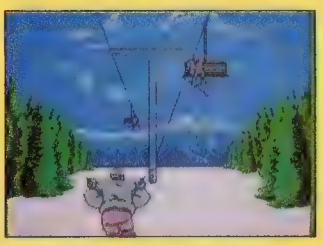
It's Dirk the Daring to the rescue in Dragon's Lair: Escape from Singe's Castle.

✔ **Space Ace II: Borf's Revenge** ($59.95) features full-screen animation and digitized sound. As with the new Dragon's Lair, Space Ace II begins where the original left off — in the spaceship of the evil Commander Borf (who is now a baby). Borf's henchmen, The Goons, bring Borf back to his full age and nasty self. Ace blasts the Goons and other Borf allies to reach the ultimate showdown with the evil Commander.

Space Ace II: Borf's Revenge.

✔ **Guy Spy** ($49.95) is more of the same. You're the world's greatest counterespionage agent out to destroy the doomsday machine of the sinister Von Max. Some detective work is involved in this cloak-and-dagger arcade-style adventure, as you track down Von Max and a terrorist group in Berlin.

All three games feature classic Don Bluth-style animation, and you have full control over the cartoon characters. For more information, call ReadySoft at (416) 731-4175. **— W.N.**



Guy Spy: doomsday in Berlin.

Past and Present with Sierra On-Line

Sierra On-Line goes from classic to contemporary with **Conquests of the Longbow** and **Police Quest 3**.

In Conquests, you assume the role of the legendary outlaw Robin Hood, as he and Maid Marian lead a guerrilla war against wicked King John and the Sheriff of Nottingham to raise King Richard's ransom.

The game builds on the role-play/arcade style of Sierra's Conquests of Camelot. You must interrogate and parlay with many different characters, but there's also archery to practice from a first-person perspective, a huge Saturday Fair to compete in (complete with archery tournament), and a confrontation in the oldest pub in England. Although your fighting skills are constantly in play, your life will also depend on mastery of magic skills, too.

Police Quest III is the latest episode in the casebook of homicide detective Sonny Bonds and the Lytton Police Department. In this installment, Lytton has grown from small town to thriving metropolis — with all the attendant problems.

Bonds starts out in traffic enforcement, as he directs traffic, chases down speeders, writes tickets, and goes to traffic court. Later, however, Sonny's wife becomes the victim of a serial killer, and as she lies in a coma he uncovers a bizarre plot connected to the psychopath.

Once again, Sonny embarks on an extensive investigation through the seamier corners of Lytton, but this time he has a state-of-the-art crime lab and a hi-tech computer at his disposal.

And fire up those sound cards. Fusion keyboard player Jan Hammer, of *Miami Vice* theme fame, scored the soundtrack, and there's digitized voice, too.

For more information, contact Sierra On-Line at (209) 683-4468. **— W.N.**

Crime Plays

U.S. Gold (San Jose, CA) takes on crime fiction and science fiction with its newest PC games.

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The Godfather ($49.95) is based on the original best-selling novel by Mario Puzo, which the director Francis Ford Coppola turned into a classic film trilogy about the Corleone crime empire and its struggle to maintain power.

U.S. Gold has incorporated scenes from all three films into this action game, which spans four decades of American history, from the 1940s to the 1970s. You play a "soldier" in the Corleone empire; rival families are trying to muscle in on the business, and you have to "protect" the family's interests and promote new "business."

The action is primarily fast-paced arcade-style gunfighting, but you also explore a rich graphics environment to learn important information. Full-color bit-mapped graphics, slick graphics-interaction sequences, and digitized sound help produce lively game play.

✔ **Cybercon III** ($44.95) is an action-packed adventure game set in a futuristic world where a super defense computer has run amok. You'll have to blast robot guards and figure out puzzling auto-defenses to make your way through a massive complex containing 400 unique locations.

The game uses U.S. Gold's "Real World" 3D graphics system to produce a smooth, quick-scrolling environment. You can even monitor enemy movement via a small TV-screen-within-a-screen. For more information, call U.S. Gold at (408) 246-6607.

— W.N.

Go back in time to the underworld of New York in the '40s with The Godfather.

NFL Pro Football

Last September, Micro Sports (Hixson, TN) signed on as Interplay's first affiliated label, and it celebrated by immediately kicking off with an updated version of **NFL Pro League Football** ($79.95), complete with improved graphics, animation, and five years' worth of statistics.

This is the only football simulation licensed by the NFL and the NFL Players Association, so it uses actual names and stats for current players as well as their offical uniforms (both home and away), team colors, and insignias. According to Micro Sports, the game also boasts "2 billion" different offensive and defensive play combinations.

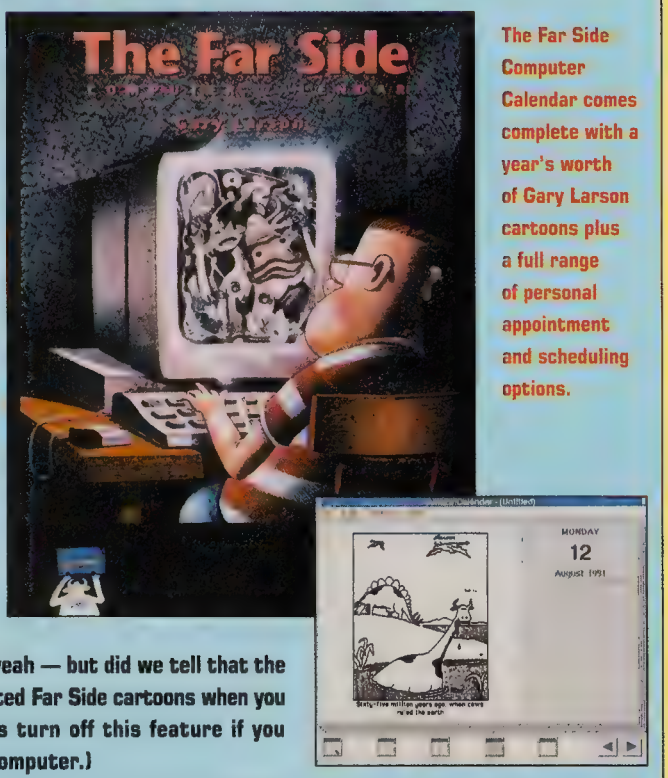
NFL Pro League Football is a coach/general manager-style game in which you call the shots from the sidelines

Compute on The Far Side

What's fun about an appointment calendar? Nothing, usually. Normally PCGames reacts to press releases on such programs with a scowl and a quick toss into the recyclables bin.

But this one's different. THE FAR SIDE COMPUTER CALENDAR ($69.95) features a year's worth of Gary Larson's characters — it's animated in every sense of the word.

The folks at Amaze (Kirkland, WA), the program's publisher, describe it as "FUNctional software." And they're right — The Far Side Computer Calendar is a fully functional, computerized personal-appointment book. You can view your schedule by the day, week, month, or year. Yeah, yeah — but did we tell that the program throws in surprise animated Far Side cartoons when you least expect it? (You can always turn off this feature if you have to let some bore use your computer.)



The Far Side Computer Calendar comes complete with a year's worth of Gary Larson cartoons plus a full range of personal appointment and scheduling options.

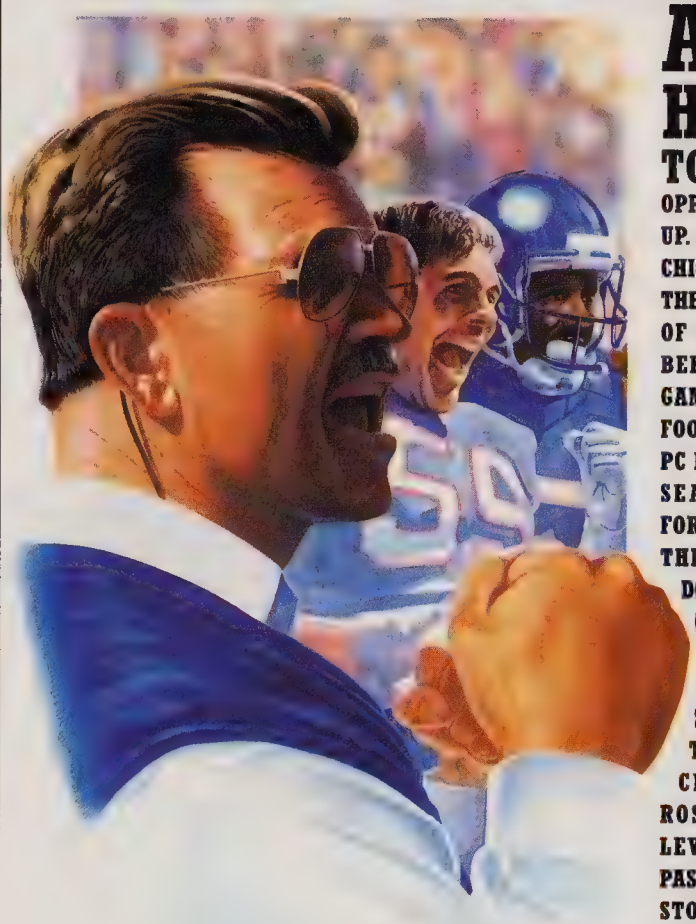
The program contains two modules: a perpetual-calendar engine and a one-year supply of Far Side cartoons. You can get refills each year without having to replace the entire calendar.

The Far Side Computer Calendar requires a Microsoft Windows-compatible PC, Windows 3.0 or later; a 1.2-megabyte disk drive or a 720K 3.5-inch disk drive; a hard-disk drive with a minimum of 400K available (1.5 megabytes recommended); and a VGA, EGA, or Super VGA monitor. A mouse is optional. For more information, contact Amaze at (206) 820-7007.

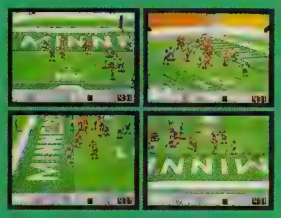
— Dan Muse

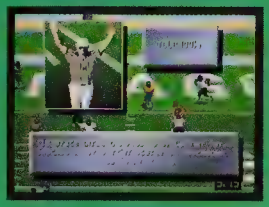
Mike Ditka Ultimate Football

"DITKA WAS OUT TO KICK BUTT AND TAKE NAMES. HE DIDN'T JUST WANT TO WIN. HE WANTED TO POUND HIS



OPPONENT INTO SUBMISSION. DON'T HOLD BACK. NEVER EASE UP. THAT'S HOW HE PLAYED. THAT'S HOW HE COACHES HIS CHICAGO BEARS." NOTHING LESS THAN THE ULTIMATE. THAT'S THE PHILOSOPHY OF MIKE DITKA. THAT'S THE SECRET BEHIND HIS NEW FOOTBALL GAME. MIKE DITKA ULTIMATE FOOTBALL,™ IS THE ONLY NEW PC FOOTBALL GAME OUT THIS SEASON. AND POUND(ING) FOR POUND(ING) IT BEATS UP THE COMPETITION. BUT HEY, DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT. CHECK OUT THE STATS FOR YOURSELF. • BIG AND BOLD 256 COLOR VGA GRAPHICS • STUNNING PLAYER ANIMATION • 28 PRO TEAMS TO CHOOSE FROM • 32-MAN ROSTERS; VARIABLE SKILL LEVELS; SUBSTITUTIONS • 4 PASSING MODES: REAL TIME OR STOP ACTION, WITH USER OR COMPUTER ASSISTED RECEIVERS • EAR POUNDING DIGITIZED SPEECH AND SOUND EFFECTS • PRACTICE MODE FOR ALL PLAYS, KICKOFF RETURNS, FIELD GOALS • BOOM FIELD GOALS WITH DITKA'S EXCLUSIVE POWER BAR™ KICKING GAME. HEAR THE CALLS OF REFEREE JIM TUNNEY, A 31 YEAR VETERAN OF THE NFL WARS. PICK APART YOUR OPPONENT WITH PLAYS YOU DESIGN OR CALL ON THE 132-PLAY PLAYBOOK. WATCH INSTANT REPLAYS FROM *FOUR* DIFFERENT ANGLES. BOTTOM LINE? DITKA DELIVERS SUPERIOR GRAPHICS, GAMEPLAY AND REALISM. TRULY THE ULTIMATE BLEND OF ACTION, STRATEGY AND TOTAL CONTROL. TO ORDER, VISIT YOUR LOCAL RETAILER OR CALL 1-800-245-7744. ACCOLADE™





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Circle 29 on Reader Service Card.

and let your team bang out each play. You can play against a friend or the computer head to head using a 198-play playbook. The game also features a special module that lets you set up a league for up to 28 players, or you can set it up to follow the real NFL season and even play upcoming games.

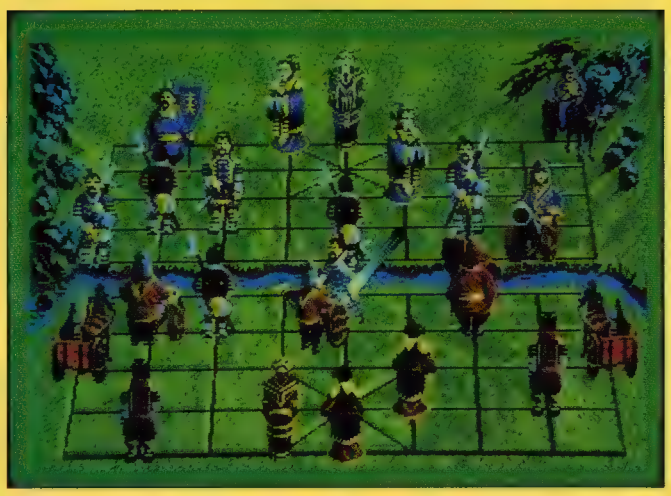
Pro League's stats-keeper module is one of the most comprehensive around, maintaining 140 categories of stats per team per game, including defensive stats. It compiles season stats in 200 categories and maintains league standings; there's a 70-category record book. This module also prints all stats and record books, including post-game stats, league leaders, and league schedules.

Additionally, you can use a modem to download current weekly NFL stats from the *USA Today* Sports Center. More? In addition to the current rosters, Micro Sports sells stats disks for '60s, '70s, and '80s rosters ($24.95 each). For more information, you can reach Micro Sports at (800) 937-7737. **— W.N.**

All This and Battle Chess II

Interplay (Santa Ana, CA) has been pumping out so many versions of Battle Chess that you may have missed **Battle Chess II: Chinese Chess** ($49.95).

Practically everyone has played Chinese chess at some time in his or her life, but the classic game of strategy and tactics has never looked or sounded like this. Battle Chess II features both 2D and 3D viewing modes.



Battle Chess II: an animated 3D free-for-all round of Chinese chess.

In 3D, a flowing river separates the two halves of the board, and, in typical Battle Chess style, the pieces come to life as they attack. The rook turns into a menacing dragon just before it fries a hapless knight; other animated pieces called "counselors" whip enormous mallets out from under their robes to flatten pawns.

Battle Chess II reportedly has the best Chinese-chess algorithm around. The program features multiple levels of difficulty and will recommend best moves, show all legal moves, and replay moves, too. According to Interplay, its Chinese Chess philosophy is "war is fun."

Checkmate: the classic challenge.

✔ If your chess tastes lean more toward the classic interpretation of the game, Interplay offers **Checkmate**.

Squeak! Squeak!

A mouse is a mouse is a mouse, right? Maybe not to a young child who sees it as some brick-like object associated with spreadsheets and word processors.

Why not shrink it down, produce it in an attractive color, and give it the physical characteristics of the rodent for which it's named? That's just what Logitech (Fremont, CA) did. Its KIDZ MOUSE ($79) is designed to fit smaller hands and look like a friendly mouse, which makes the computer more inviting. Logitech will also include First Byte's DINOSAUR DISCOVERY KITS with the Kidz Mouse package. The software is designed to build reading and problem-solving abilities as it encourages kids to use the mouse and learn good computing skills.

Logitech's Kidz Mouse: easy computing for little ones.

The Kidz Mouse works with any IBM PC, XT, AT, PS/2, or compatible. It's designed to be easy to install and features two buttons (disguised as mouse ears) you can set to act as one. To stop the Kidz Mouse from affecting another mouse or trackball already installed, you have to type the child's name to activate it.

This isn't just a one-child mouse, though; Logitech's lifetime warranty means that the Kidz Mouse is a perfect hand-me-down input device when one child's ready to move on to a bigger mouse — input device, that is. For more information, contact Logitech at (415)-792-8500.

— Dan Muse

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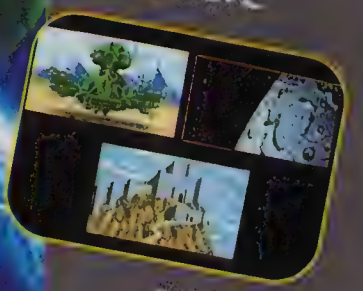

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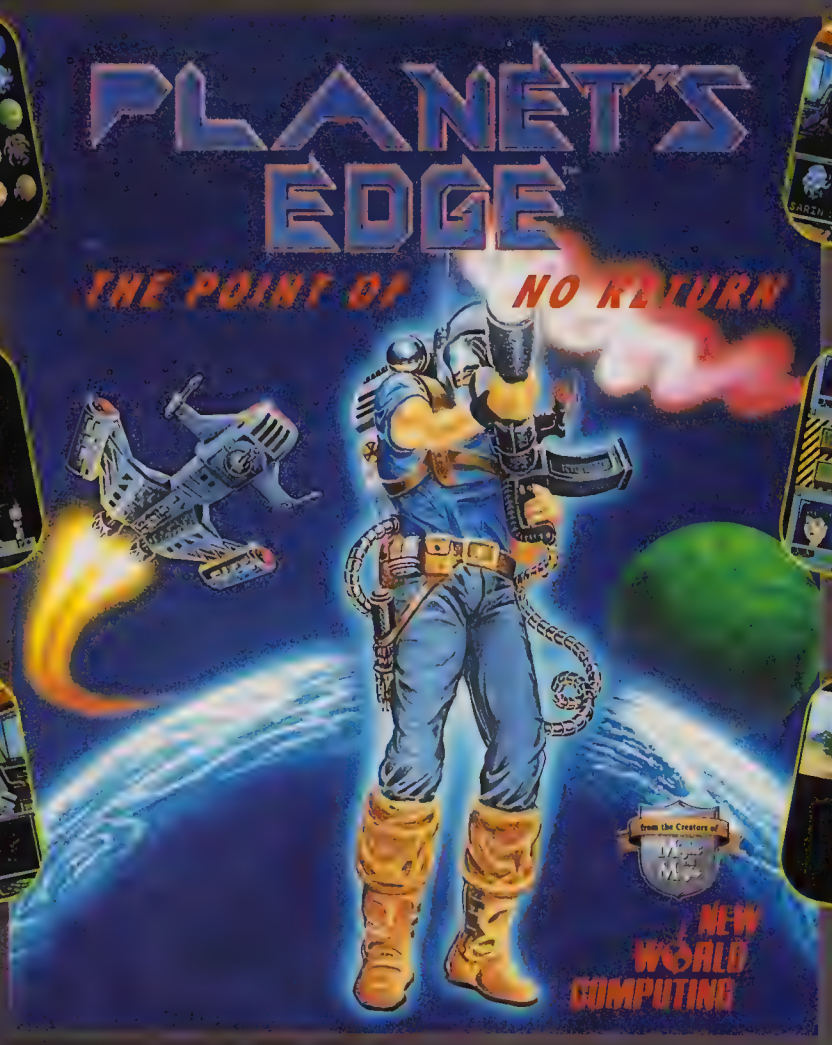

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NEW WORLD COMPUTING

This versatile program is set to go head to head with hard-core chess programs such as Chessmaster 2100 and Sargon 4. It features an opening library of 300,000 moves and adds strong moves to its library as it plays. Play in 2D or 3D graphics modes; you can play solo or face-to-face, or just watch Checkmate play a game. There's a built-in play clock, and you can alter or set up any position to study chess problems. Make a move on Interplay by calling (800) 969-4263.

— W.N.

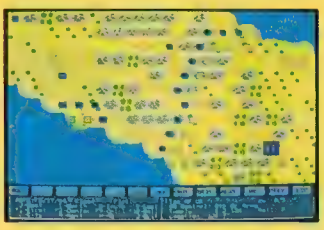
S.S.I. Goes to War

Strategic Simulations, Inc. (Sunnyvale, CA), is featuring war strategy games from three different eras.

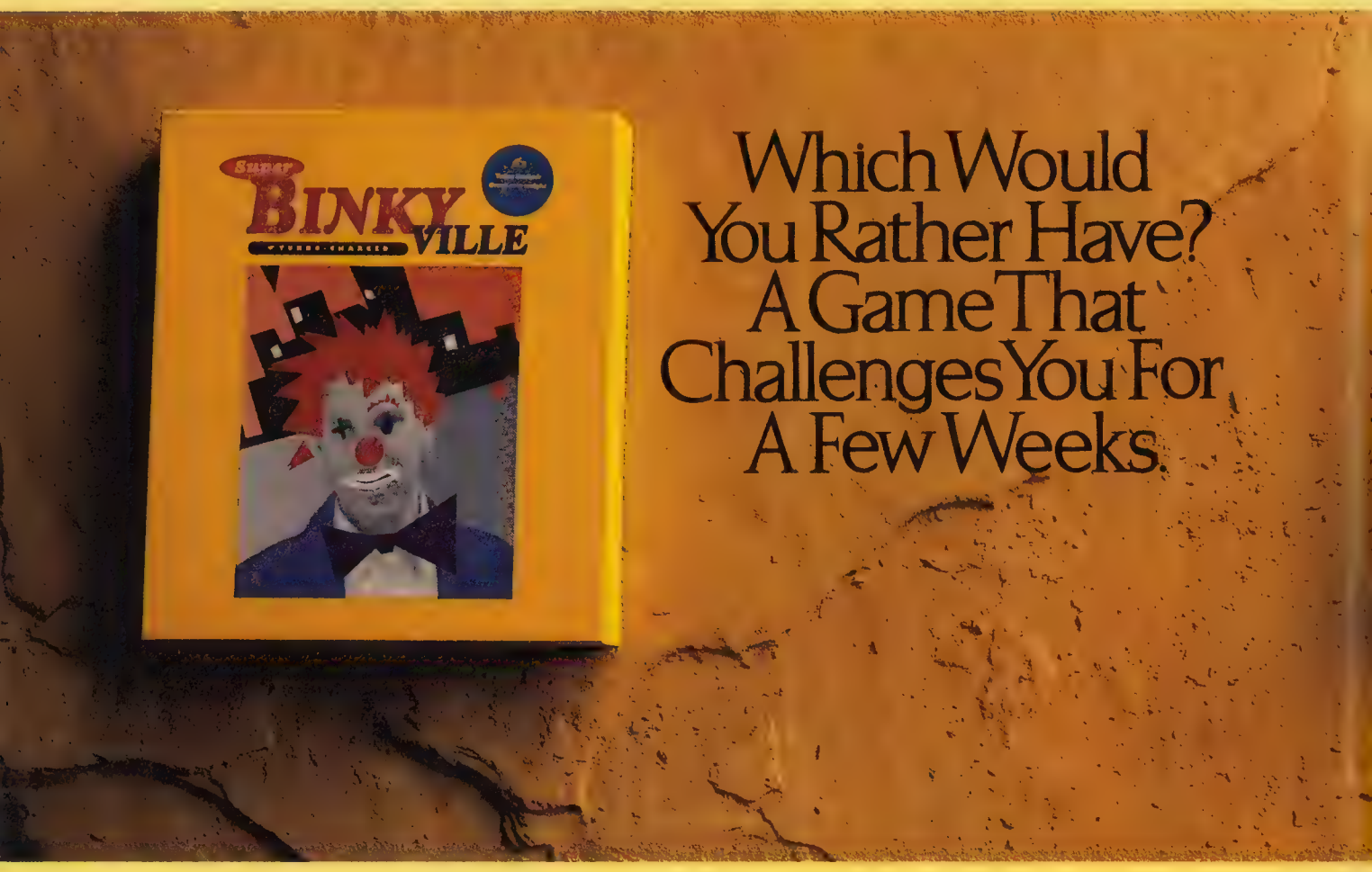
No Greater Glory: North meets South on the field of battle.

✔ **No Greater Glory: The American Civil War** ($69.95) takes you back to the great conflict of 1861–65, in which you play either Abraham Lincoln or Jefferson Davis. What's interesting about this one-player game is that you cover the entire war, including land and sea battles, as well as political, economic, diplomatic, and social elements. Consequently, not only do you move your armies across the map and conduct bloody battles, you also enter debates over issues such as slavery, inflation, and enlistment of blacks in the army. Included with the game is a copy of the classic Civil War novel *The Red Badge of Courage*.

✔ **Western Front: The Liberation of Europe 1944–1945** ($59.95) takes the now-famous war-game system from Second Front (a top-notch simulation of the battles in Russia during



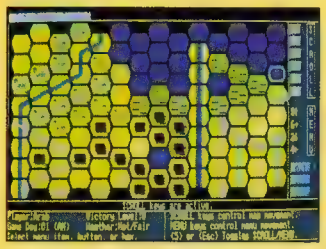
Western Front: Liberation of Europe.



World War II) and focuses it on the WWII conflict in Europe from May 17, 1944 (just before D-Day), to VE-Day in 1945. You play Eisenhower or Rommel as you control every detail of the land and air wars, from massive strategic bombing all the way down to infantry squads and directing war production facilities.

For one or two players, Western Front contains the campaign game Overlord and three smaller scenarios: *Breakout from Normandy*, *Battle for Italy*, and *Battle of the Bulge*. The game map covers France, England, southern Italy, and Germany east to Berlin.

✔ **Conflict: Middle East** ($59.95) draws on contemporary headlines. This is a brigade/division-level war game, featuring the historical 1973 Arab/Israeli conflict and a hypothetical 1990s clash. The game



Conflict: Middle East.

system is an enhanced version of SSI's Red Lightning program. Players command either Israeli or Arab Coalition land and air forces, down to individual infantry squads and tanks. For more information, contact SSI at (408) 737-6800. — **W.N.**

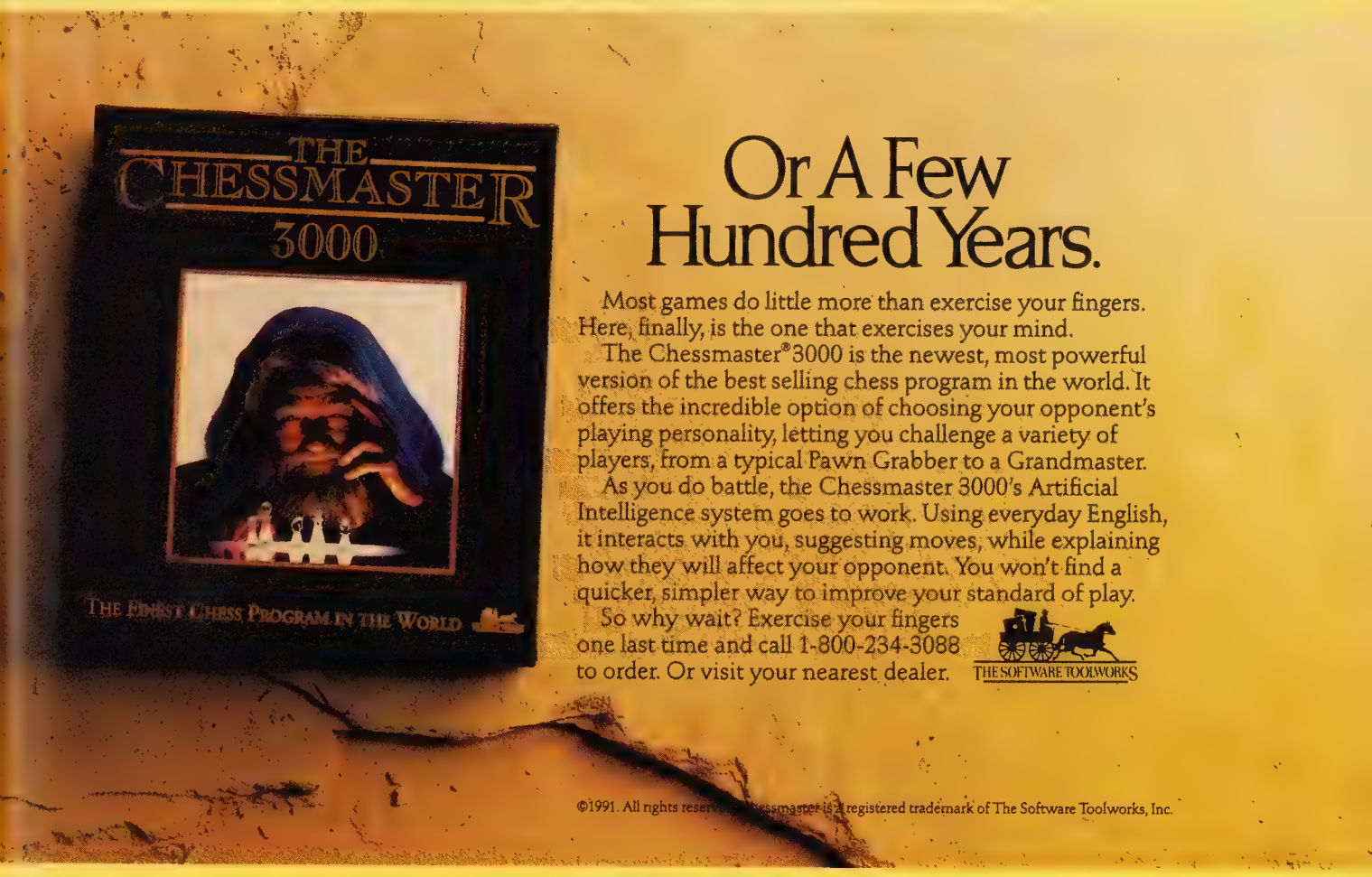
Joystick Meets Mouse

Advanced Gravis helped put the "joy" in "joystick," and now it's ready to stick a "mouse" in there, too. **The Gravis MouseStick** ($129.95) is a high-resolution optical input device that functions as both joystick and mouse. It houses a dedicated processing unit that you configure, with custom control and button functions specific to a particular game or simulation program. Predefined settings for many popular games are included.

You use utility software to modify cursor (or character) response to the joystick's movements. You can specify direct control, vectoring, a dead-center zone, or a combination. Each of the MouseStick's three buttons can control cursor movement and emulate keystrokes. It also features eight handle-tension settings. Contact Advanced Gravis at (800) 663-8558. — **W.N.**

Konami Draws a Crowd

Konami (Buffalo Grove, IL) announced a flood of PC games at the summer Consumer Electronics Show (see "CES Report," October 1991), most of which were based on licensing agreements with movie and cartoon production com-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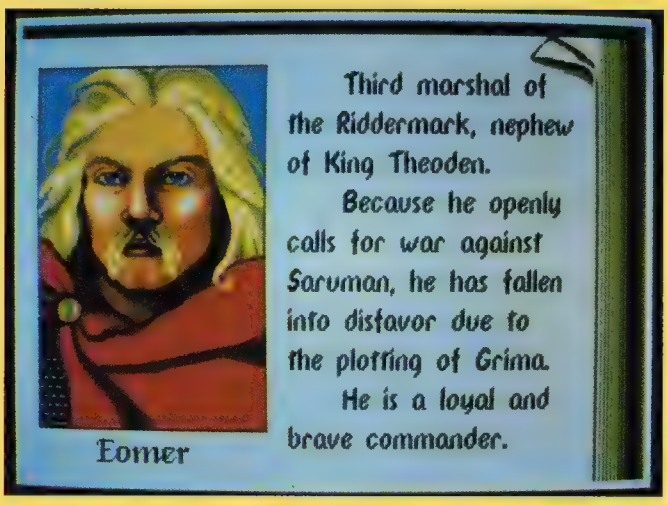
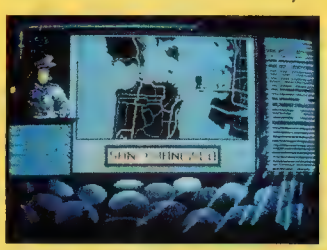
panies. Here are some details on some of the more unusual games in the bunch.


Third marshal of the Riddermark, nephew of King Theoden.
Because he openly calls for war against Saruman, he has fallen into disfavor due to the plotting of Grima.
He is a loyal and brave commander.
Eomer

Riders of Rohan, adapted from J.R.R. Tolkien's The Two Towers.

✔ **Riders of Rohan** ($49.95) ought to turn a few lights on with J.R.R. Tolkien devotees. This complex role-play/war-strategy game is set in Rohan of Tolkien's Middle Earth during the War of the Ring. It encompasses the battle for Rohan, which takes place in *The Two Towers*, the second book of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. All the classic Ring characters are at your command, including Gandalf, Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas, and you must use all of them to eventually defeat the evil Saruman. Characters parlay with other characters in the game for helpful information and items, and they build up individual skills. You plan and execute grand map-based battle campaigns, of course, but you also engage in arcade-style duels with your enemies, which tap your skills with hand-to-hand weapons, archery, and magic spells.

✔ **Killing Cloud** ($49.95) is a first-person police-dragnet game set in 21st-century San Francisco, where the city's famous fog has become a deadly toxic mist. Your task is to wrest control of the city from the Black Angel gang (and hold your breath).



SF's famous fog is now a Killing Cloud.

✔ **Spacewrecked** ($49.95) sports a sharp visual design, although it leans more toward the cartoonish. The fun-filled graphics images illustrate an extensive fantasy role-play game. You awaken in a space lifeboat in the year 2195 (shades of Alien). You're stuck in a fleet of 20 biological-survey ships stranded in space. The crew members either have gone mad or are locked in cryogenic chambers. Aliens from the specimen lab have overrun the ships. You and a team of robots must repair all 20 ships before you can continue your journey to Earth. You can switch tools and weapons to either hand, inject yourself with drugs to regain stamina, and even monitor your health by listening to your heartbeat. For more information, contact Konami at (708) 215-5100. **— W.N.**

Aliens run amok in Spacewrecked.

By Land or Sea

Quantum Quality Productions (Flemington, NJ) recently released two new military strategy games: **The Lost Admiral** ($59.95) and **The Perfect General** ($59.95).

The Lost Admiral consists of 10 scenarios, 15 campaigns, an in-depth ranking system, and a complete record system of games played. Your mission is to capture territory and hold ports. Your fleet includes battleships, carriers, submarines, and much more.

In The Perfect General, you capture and hold cities. Weapons consist of armored cars, light tanks, heavy tanks, mobile artillery, bazookas, and more. The game features three levels of difficulty.

Both games offer AdLib and SoundBlaster support and include color maps for each scenario. For more information, contact Quantum at (908) 788-2799.

— D.M.

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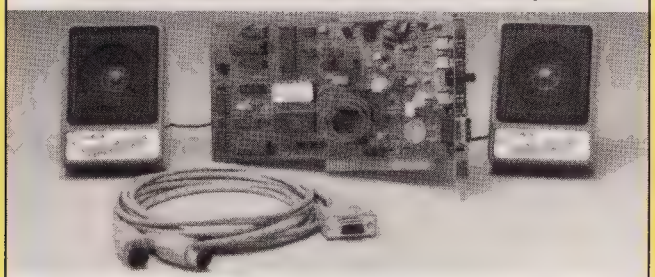

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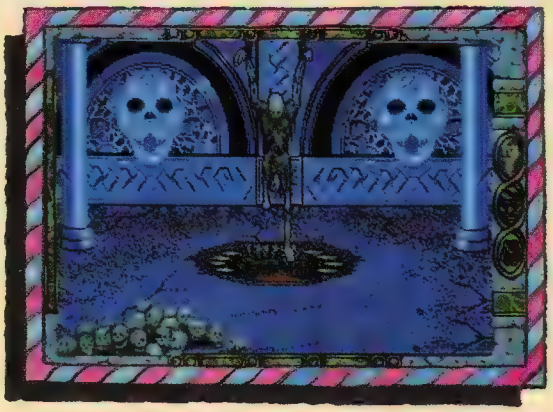
Only with luck, courage and constant struggle will Conan have the chance to force a reckoning with the powerful Thoth Amon.



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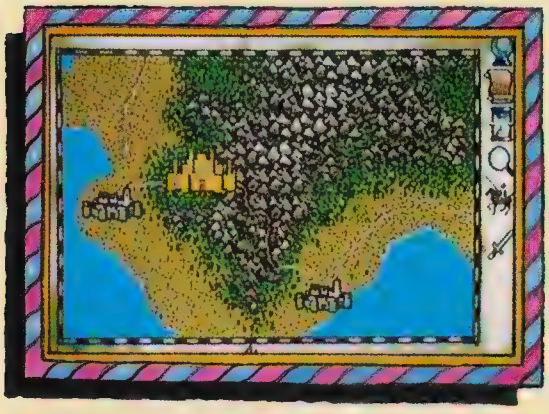

In Spirit of Excalibur, the Knights of the Round Table fought to defend medieval Britain from the evil sorceress, Morgan Le Fay. Morgan, dabbling in dark arts beyond even her ability to control, had summoned a great Lord of Demons, the Shadowmaster.

With Morgan's death, the Shadowmaster was freed to work his evil will against the unprepared folk of Britain. Striking in the night, he imprisoned the King with a spell, stole the greatest treasures of the realm and kidnapped Nineve, the court enchantress. With the loss of the sword Excalibur and the newly recovered Holy Grail, Britain begins to sicken and die. The Shadowmaster must be stopped!

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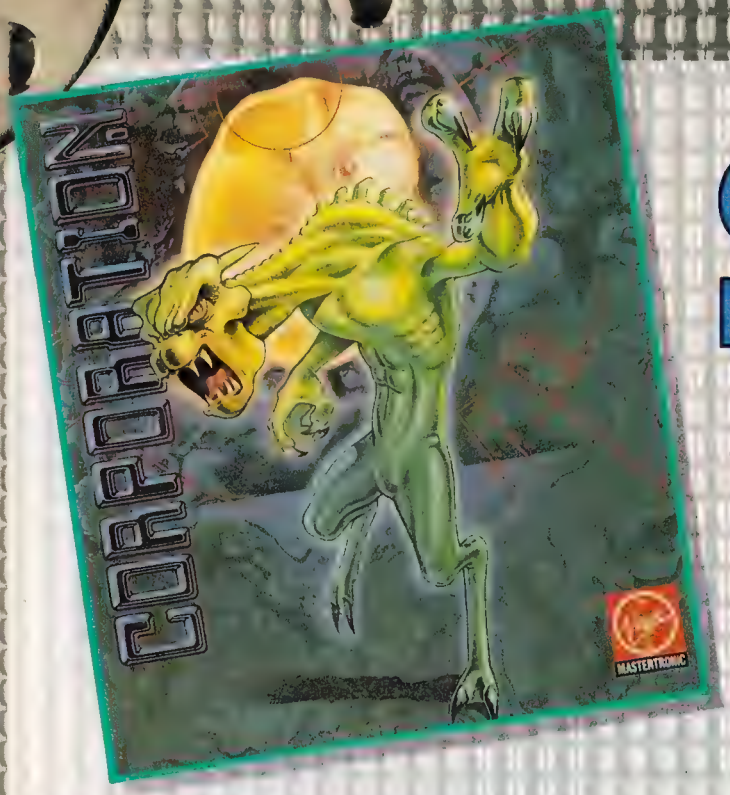

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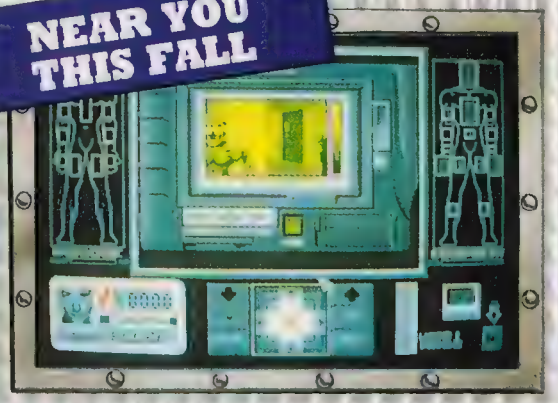

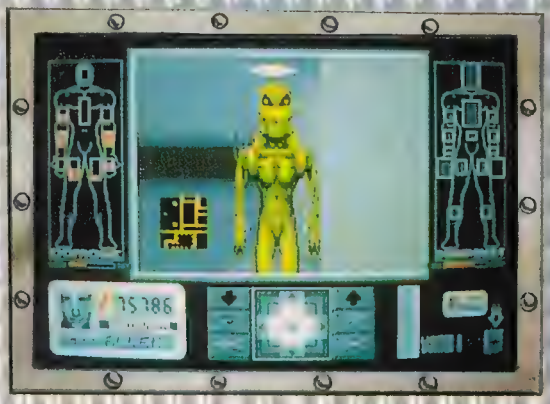

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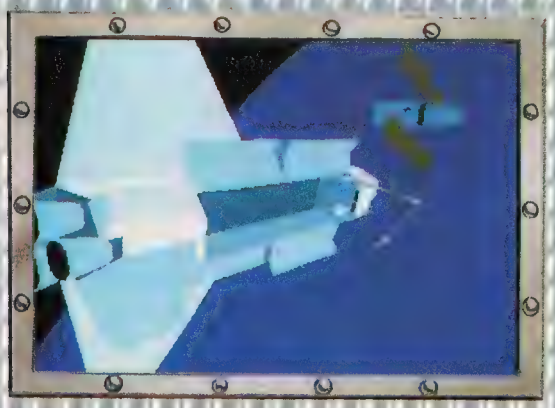

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THE FIRST AND FINAL FRONTIER

By Bernie Yee

REMEMBER THE COMPUTERS WE GREW UP WITH — the ones on board those science-fiction spaceships in movies and on television? What was one without the other? The lure of outer space and our fascination with computers seemed to go hand in hand. They were the two stars in our wildest fantasies. Well, that winning combination is still inspiring imaginations today — except the excitement has beamed itself from the silver screen to the computer screen.

The action is more sophisticated than ever. Do you remember the granddaddy of computer space games? Star Trek, a text-based two-dimensional game in which you took command of the *Enterprise* to rid the galaxy of an improbable number of Klingons, may have been fun, but it certainly can't compare with the next generation — of games, that is.

Remember Star Raiders? Although it's considered the first state-of-the-art space game (you played it on the ancient Atari 800 in the early '80s) because it included fast color graphics and four-voice sound, it merely paved the way for better, faster, and more

ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT MORRISSEY

powerful starfighters to come. Thanks to these space-age classics, their descendants, now called space games, combine elements of both role play and arcade action to once again bring us face to face with the the final frontier.

First Contact

Wing Commander, already a classic, accomplishes the not-so-easy feat of making you think you're playing a role, all without any interactive role-play elements.

Origin discovered that even a simple, non-interactive background story could carry a game — even one based on an old idea — right into the stratosphere. Based on a series of cockpit-viewpoint space battles linked by text and graphics sequences, Wing Commander is a synergistic blend of music, sound, graphics, action, and story that mesmerizes and captivates like a roller-coaster B movie.

To be honest, Wing Commander's plot is two-dimensional. The characters you'll encounter are broad caricatures, but like a great 1950s science-

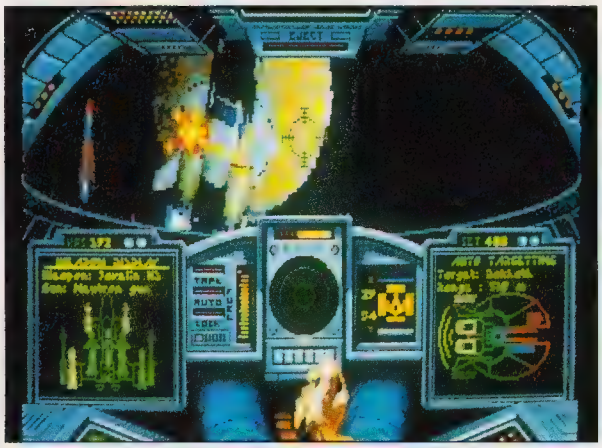
Cockpit-viewpoint space battles are Wing Commander's drawing card.

fiction movie, the plot is so obvious that you become a willing victim quickly.

The premise of Wing Commander is simple enough: Terrans and the cat-like Kilrathi are at war. You play the part of a new Terran Confederation starfighter pilot, serving on the *Tiger's Claw*, a starfighter carrier. You and a computer-controlled wingman are to search and destroy a whole range of enemy spacecraft, and on occasion, defend and escort friendly ships.

Your fighter has several flight controls — weapons, communication systems, shields and armor meters, and even an eject button. The controls are fairly intuitive: Pressing **W** cycles through your available missiles, while pressing **G** cycles through your guns, which range from lasers and mass drivers to neutron weapons. The combination of joystick and keyboard control works great, but keyboard and mouse are unwieldy at best. Other keys switch between forward, right and left side, and rear views, along with various external panoramic views. You can issue orders to your wingman via context-sensitive menu selections. Communications can also goad enemies, perhaps distracting them from a besieged colleague.

Wing Commander's beauty, and its most noticeable flaw, is your selection of wingmen. Each has a distinctive personality and flying style. Although this second ship backs you up and helps you out, the



Visual drama keeps you hooked on Wing Commander.

pilot's artificial intelligence is questionable. Your success in combat determines the course of the Kilrathi war, and such things as promotions, your next mission, your next wingman, and your next fighter. If you've been unsuccessful, you'll end up on a losing path flying against near-impossible odds with a sociopathic wingman. More than one Wing Commander has been known to destroy Maniac, a crazed wingman, even before engaging the Kilrathi.

Animation and speech make Wing Commander II doubly addictive.

Although the game's graphics aren't as good as the box cover promises, the strongest aspect of the game is its cinematic perspective. Panning camera shots and panoramic camera angles include such

views as your battered ship, which trails sparks and debris as it flys off into the vastness of space — great visual drama. The music only sometimes lapses into

Salvage your reputation as you blast the Kilrathi in WC II.

cheesiness, but it sets an effective mood with branching musical themes, depending on the action.

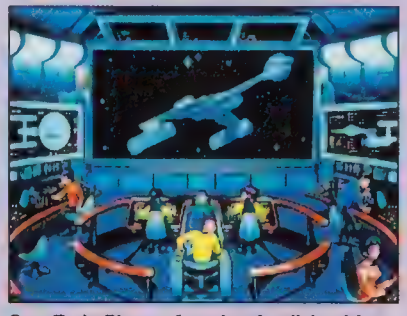
Origin also offers secondary disks titled *Secret Missions*, which further Wing Commander's game play. The first mission takes the *Tiger's Claw* into Kilrathi space to destroy a secret planet-killing weapon. The second helps set the plot for Wing Commander 2 by introducing new characters, as well as by developing and killing old ones. This second mission uses a revamped artificial intelligence, so enemy pilots are tougher than before. Each Secret Missions disk lets you go back and fly any mission in the original Wing Commander.

All told, Wing Commander has flaws: You're always outnumbered and outgunned, and your wingman's abilities are limited. And there are some problems with flying too close to large ships — the game's bit-mapped images shift so radically that you may think you're narrowly missing a collision when actually you're headed for a smashup. And there are several small bugs in the program, such as

ON THE GALACTIC HORIZON

Several new games are set to make PC players race into space even faster.

Enjoying critical success with its J.R.R. Tolkien license, Interplay Productions will roll out STAR TREK: THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY this fall. Many have tried to do justice to Star Trek on the PC screen, and have failed. Interplay has a shot at being the first success.

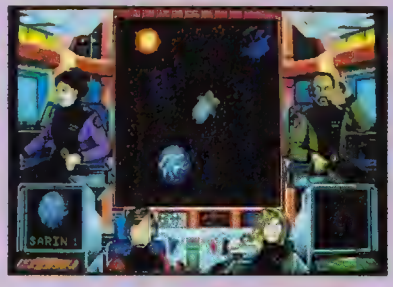


Star Trek: Plenty of combat for diehard fans.

Describing Star Trek with the phrase "Wing Commander meets Sierra," Interplay previewed bit-mapped 3D Klingon enemies, as well as Sierra-esque planet exploration and alien interaction. There are numerous screens of planetary exploration, and a bridge command center where space combat takes place. Interplay must have Trekkers on staff, because it's paid such attention to detail. Designers timed the transporter sequence from the TV show and duplicated it in the game. (The sparkle effect, though, is more reminiscent of the movie versions.)

New World Computing is stepping up its efforts, and hopes to release PLANET'S EDGE soon, a space exploration and combat game. Using a different engine from the one found in Might and Magic, Planet's Edge sets you solving the mystery of an alien probe, which entered the solar system and seemed to make the Earth vanish in a space/time rift.

You'll travel to different planets and explore and interact with aliens in your customized starship, all the while acquiring new and more powerful technologies. The planetary movement is of the top-down variety, and it looks much like Infocom's BattleTech: Inception game, albeit more detailed in VGA.



Explore other worlds in Planet's Edge.

Paragon Software, known for its MegaTraveller series, enters the space gaming arena with MANTIS, a space-fighter simulation. The inevitable comparisons with Wing Commander II will follow, but Mantis promises a few twists that may distance it from Origin's benchmark games.

Mantis will use filled-polygon graphics images to depict the spacecraft. It will lose the amazing detail of Wing Commander, but perhaps gain the fluidity and flying precision that marks MicroProse's Hyperspeed.

Mantis will also use bit-mapped graphics images, so explosions will billow in the familiar Wing Commander orange/yellow/white display. Paragon also promises to pilot Mantis in a different direction from Wing Commander II. Rather than stick to combat settings, Mantis flights will include science, exploration, and scouting missions to give the game a more balanced feel.

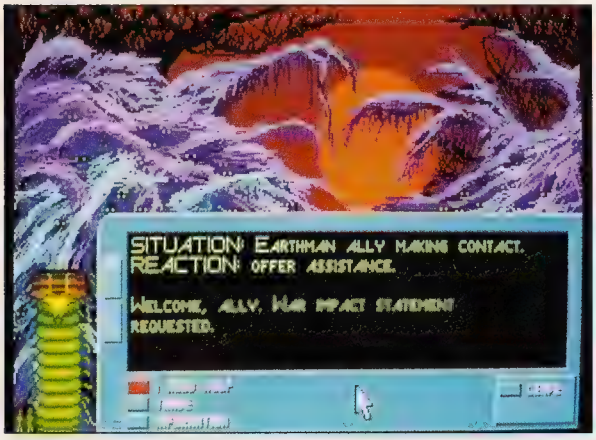
And surely WING COMMANDER III is rolling around Chris Roberts' clever head. All in all, with a lineup like this, there's a promising future for space gamers. — B.Y.

occasional problems with calibrating the joystick.

These minor points aside, Wing Commander lights up your afterburners and blows your flight suit right off. (And don't forget to take a look at our evaluation of Wing Commander II, below.)

Plotting a Different Course

Hyperspeed opts for a different approach to space games, and achieves mixed results. In some ways this game outshines even Wing Commander II, but it never quite comes together — it's not as compelling and addictive as either Origin offering. Still, Hyperspeed offers elements that the Wing Commander series neglects.



HyperSpeed's shaded polygon graphics make for smooth animation.

While Wing Commander has a *Star Wars* feel, Hyperspeed will remind you more of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Hyperspeed uses MicroProse's shaded polygon graphics for incredibly smooth movement and animation. The latter is so good, Wing Commander can only wish it were its equal.

Hyperspeed offers you the command of a starship the size of Manhattan. After humanity ruined its own ecosystem, the inhabitants needed a new place to settle and abuse; your mission is to scout out a new cluster of star systems. You have four clusters to explore, each with a different degree of difficulty, each populated with distinctive, creatively illustrated alien races. You can strike alliances with aliens for trading purposes or for peace treaties, or attack them so that your new Earth will be safe. Of course, each alien has a different temperament — some hostile, others meek.

Your starship has a main cockpit in which you can maneuver and fire your main gun and missiles. You control the speed and direction of your ship using a joystick, mouse, or keyboard. You'll master the controls quickly. Other areas, such as the defensive blaster cockpit and the engine room, require discrete components, and can be damaged in combat.

In fact, Hyperspeed puts a lot of emphasis on the engine room. It's only partially filled at first — empty areas await new parts to improve the efficiency of your ship's systems. You get these new components through trade or combat. By defeating hostile alien ships you can scavenge a random number of useful pieces from the debris. Your starbase provides you with a commodity — information to trade with the various alien races. You can claim empty planets for colonization and natural resources, giving you even more trade goods.

Combat takes place with regularity. Your most effective weapon is the main gun, fired from your main cockpit — it's capable of destroying starbases with several hits. Some ships have a field generator that neutralizes your main gun, so you have to take out the generator with missiles. These missiles range from guided fighters or kamikazes to computerized homing missiles. Like your ship, though, alien vessels work defensive blasters to destroy poorly piloted missiles. Each alien has its own distinctive weapons systems and mode of attack.

You never die in Hyperspeed. If your ship is destroyed, you return to your starbase and get outfitted with a new one. You'll probably be disappointed to find there's no interplanetary travel. Although you pilot your ship against the enemy, you never see planets; they only appear on an information screen.

HyperSpeed puts you in the cockpit with incredible realism.

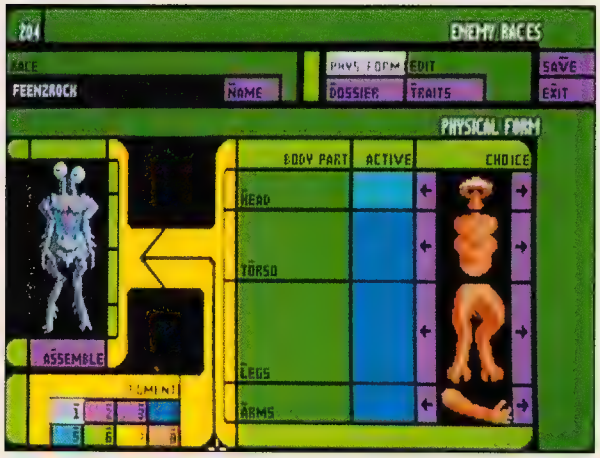
Many of the complaints against Lightspeed are still valid with Hyperspeed. (Hyperspeed is simply Lightspeed with a larger universe to explore — my guess is that MicroProse realized Lightspeed was just too small a game.) The game ignores planet exploration, the storyline seems disjointed and spotty, and you get the distinct feeling that it exists merely to spotlight MicroProse's sophisticated animation.

There are minor features, such as the rotating 3D star map, which are technical niceties. And both

graphics and sound are well done. You can fly your missile right up to the enemy, let loose, and pull up with much more accuracy and realism than Wing Commander. In that sense, Hyperspeed puts you in the space cockpit with incredible realism. A little more unsettling is the idea that you may have to destroy one or more alien races to preserve your own. Even the space-operatic Wing Commander briefly raises the issues of genocide and racism. But Hyperspeed as a whole is still less than the sum of its technically impressive parts.

Cut From a Different Cloth

Omnitrend's **Rules of Engagement** takes a completely different approach to space gaming. Although still in real time, it puts you in command not just of a fighter, but of a starship and an entire fleet. While you control your starship, your subordinate captains (like Wing Commander's wingmen) labor under different personalities, strengths, and weaknesses.



Rules of Engagement's distinctive overlapping-windows interface.

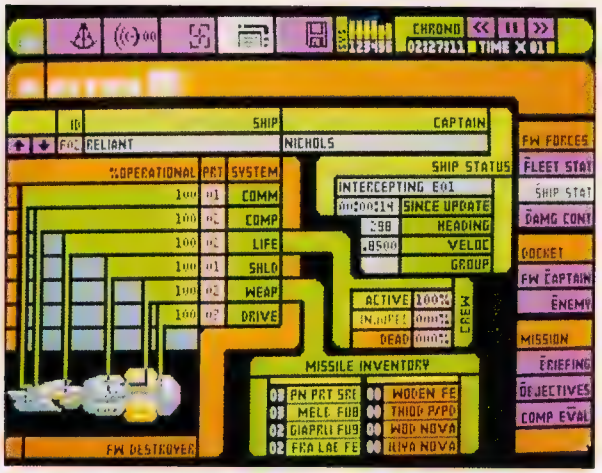
Rules of Engagement takes place after a period of galactic colonization via hyperspace boosters, alien artifacts of unknown origin. Like ancient Rome, humanity's far-flung empire of planets became too difficult to control, and two factions emerged: the Federated Worlds (you) and the United Democratic Planets. A civil war has just started, and you play fleet commander in the conflict.

Rules of Engagement is essentially a tactical war game involving starships in real-time conflict. This theme even drives the game's overlapping-windows-style interface. A mouse works best in this pseudo touch-sensitive display. Although you command the operations of your ship, you can give only broad orders such as *destroy* or *capture* to your subordinate commanders. Each commander has a dossier of strengths and weaknesses, so like Wing Commander, you must rely on their distinct abilities to aid your mission objective — whether it's an attack on a space station or on an enemy strike fleet.

Graphics images and sound aren't emphasized here, as opposed to Hyperspeed and Wing Commander. Only CGA and EGA are supported; the decision to abandon VGA makes design sense in a game that deals with tactics, but at the same time it immediately brands Rules of Engagement with an out-of-date look.

The interface can be overwhelming, but as soon as you realize that only the blue and magenta buttons really work, your life becomes much easier. With these controls, you give orders to your fleet to engage enemy ships, scan status reports on your fleet and fleet commanders, raise your shields, charge your beam weapons, and move to intercept your prey. You have an array of missiles, as well as an energy weapon, at your disposal, and you can pinpoint your attacks on specific subsystems of the target. By destroying its shields, weapons, and drive system, you can board the enemy craft to complete your mission — some require that you retrieve certain articles from enemy spacecraft.

Exploration occurs with Omnitrend's *Interlocking Game System* (IGS). When you board a ship, you switch to **Breach II**,-another Omnitrend game, if that scenario has been designed for IGS play. In Breach II, you move your squadron of soldiers around the enemy ship individually, looting weapons and killing the crew. The IGS interconnects seamlessly, and Breach II itself is fun to play as you rampage through the enemy's spacecraft. If you don't have Breach II, Rules of Engagement simply calculates the outcome of your boarding attempt and tells you of casualties and success or failure. Breach II adds a unique dimension to the game and is recommended for Rules of Engagement owners.



Rules of Engagement: The tactical approach to space warfare.

Like Wing Commander, this war is an ongoing

campaign. Numerous scenarios await, some available only when you reach a certain rank. Rules of Engagement comes with a mission builder, so that when you finish the included missions, you can create ships and new alien races to encounter and conquer.

With its unique emphasis on small-scale starship conflicts, Rules of Engagement proves to be an enjoyable game. Still, when stacked up against the current VGA/Sound Blaster knockouts of today, it suffers (and a bit unfairly) in comparison. The game was designed as a tactical approach to space warfare, and glitzy VGA graphics images aren't really a necessity. Still, when the tactical display shows an enemy ship rendered in drab EGA, with primitive graphics images illustrating explosions and weapons fire, you can't help but get the feeling that this game is already dated.

Nonetheless, Rules of Engagement should please players who opt for a more tactical, multiship space game than the arcade-like Wing Commander. And with the addition of Breach II, Rules of Engagement creates a one-of-a-kind game environment.

It's too bad that the interactive CD-ROM games currently in development (and soon to arrive) will antiquate a game such as Rules of Engagement so quickly.

The Final Frontier

Wing Commander II: The Vengeance of the Kilrathi, may have been the most eagerly awaited sci-fi sequel since George Lucas' *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Like its ancestor, Wing Commander II is a *Star Wars*-style game. The story is simple: At the end of Secret Missions II, you were promoted to Colonel, and headed up the *Tiger's Claw* flight squadron. On routine patrol, you encountered Kilrathi stealth fighters, but you attributed their cloaking to your radar malfunction.

When you returned to the *Claw*, you found it destroyed. Your flight recorder was missing and no one believed your tale about the stealth fighters. You're branded a coward, or worse, a traitor. Because the future has fair trials, you're acquitted owing to a lack of direct evidence, but you're reassigned by the Admiral to a backwater post with In-System Security. And then — drum roll, please — your routine patrol runs into some unexpected and unwelcome cat ships.

This entire setup is run through in a series of animated, movie-style sequences. If you have a Sound Blaster sound board, you'll hear speech, with different voices for each character. An optional Sound Blaster package gives you full voice support for combat messages — one wingman has a Southern accent, and Ralgha, your renegade Kilrathi wingman, sounds like a basso-throated Klingon. All by itself, Wing Commander II makes Sound Blaster the sound card of choice for the IBM PC or compatible.

There's still no interaction with the Wing

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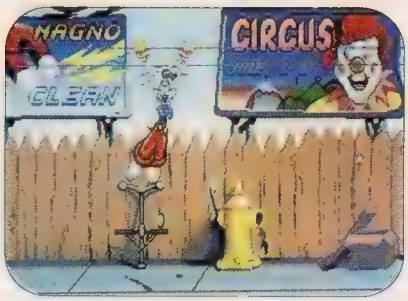

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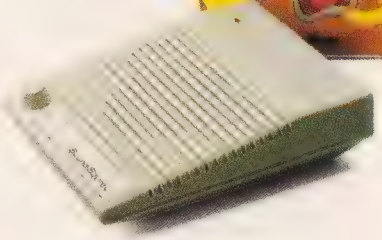

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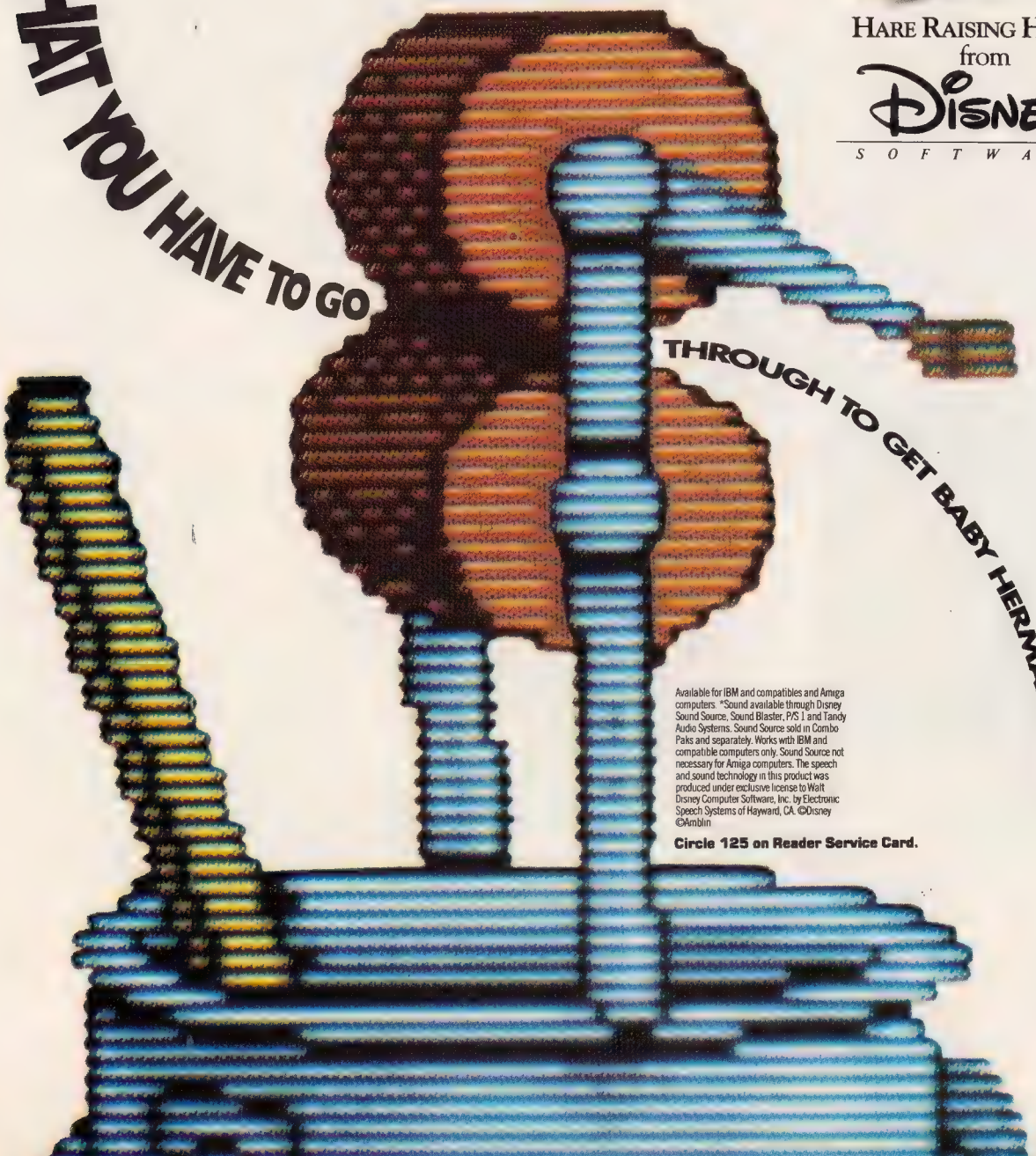

Available for IBM and compatibles and Amiga computers. *Sound available through Disney Sound Source, Sound Blaster, P/S 1 and Tandy Audio Systems. Sound Source sold in Combo Paks and separately. Works with IBM and compatible computers only. Sound Source not necessary for Amiga computers. The speech and sound technology in this product was produced under exclusive license to Walt Disney Computer Software, Inc. by Electronic Speech Systems of Hayward, CA. ©Disney ©Amblin

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Commander II pilots, though the storyline is much more detailed. It's more a focal point of the game than in Wing Commander, but interactive conversations would have been welcome.

The music is similar to, but better than, Wing Commander's, with different variations and themes — just like movie music. And Wing Commander II is big, over 20 megabytes with the speech accessory module. It also has something called *dynamic intelligence*, which matches the nonplayer character's flying ability to yours. Wingmates fly better, while the Kilrathi definitely fly smarter here than in the original.

Wing Commander II is basically a much-improved refinement of the original system. Your flight skills transfer neatly, so flying feels slightly awkward, but reassuringly familiar when you first sit in the cockpit of the Ferret. Unlike Wing Commander, there's no practice mode in Wing Commander II, so you may want to pick up Wing Commander and its Secret Missions at the same time. You can then lock yourself in a room with a PC and stay under for days.

Capital ships now have phase shields, which prevent any regular fighter weapon from even scratching the paint. In Wing Commander, you could fly a lone Hornet and take down a starbase. In Wing Commander II, to destroy a capital ship you must fly the not-so-maneuverable Broadsword, launch a specially designed torpedo that can slip through the phase shields, and hang around long enough to see it lock on.

Add-on scenarios, called *Special Operations*, are planned. Wing Commander II is as terrifyingly addictive as the original. Playing both back to back comes as close to being in *Star Wars* as you can get on your desktop.

Take Us Out of Orbit

A whole new role-playing environment may evolve from this game technology. The Rules of Engagement/Breach II combination is a step in that direction, but the glue that both Rules of Engagement and Hyperspeed lack is a plotline, Wing Commander's forte.

The next wave of space games is coming soon, with even more sophisticated games under development and new hardware on the horizon. (See the accompanying sidebar, "On the Galactic Horizon.") The next generation of space games is bound to take us where no gamer has gone before. ❑

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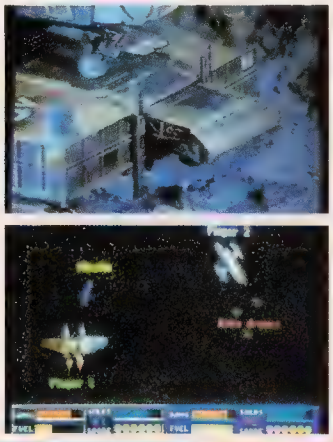

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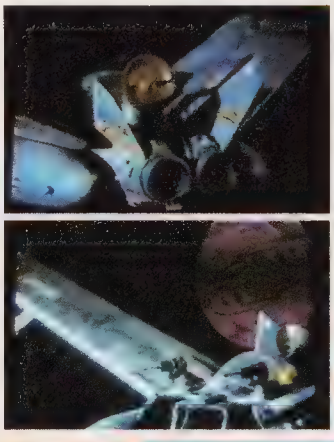

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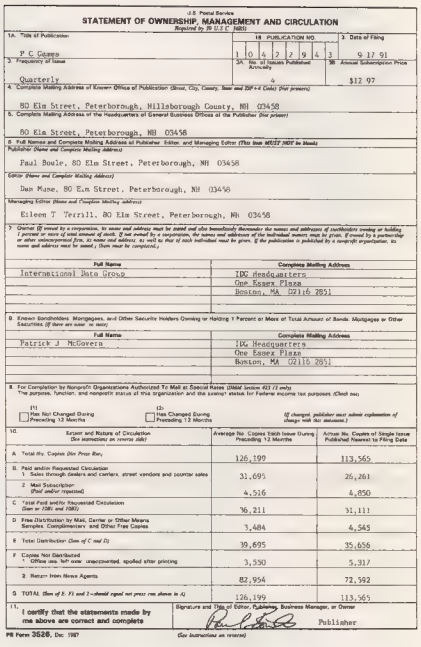

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Throw in some brawling with storm troopers, dodging V-1 missiles and dogfighting amidst a squadron of enemy fighter planes, and you'll begin to get the feel of what it's like to be *The Rocketeer*.

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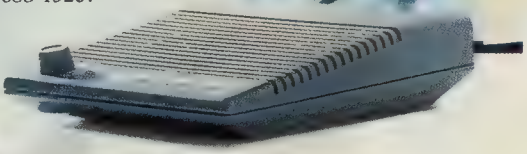

Available for IBM and compatible computers. *Sound available through Disney Sound Source, Sound Blaster, P/S 1 and Tandy Audio Systems. Sound Source sold in Combo Paks and separately. Works with IBM and compatible computers only. The speech and sound technology in this product was produced under exclusive license to Walt Disney Computer Software, Inc. by Electronic Speech Systems of Hayward, CA. ©Disney

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'Tis The Season To Be Playing

If you're pressed to come up with a great gift for the holidays, or you just want to drop a few good hints on the right people, our holiday shopping guide is for you.

By the Editors and Writers of PCGames

How many shopping days left? We've broken enough shrink wrap to smother the North Pole, and played so many betas that our PCs simply twitched and died — all in the quest for the dream gift list. *PCGames*' annual (okay, it's the first, but we swear we'll do this again next year) guide to game gift giving puts 20 products up for consideration. No losers here, only the top picks of *PCGames*' editors and regular reviewers.

The 20 that came out on top are the personal favorites of people who make a living playing games. And we're confident that our list has something for everyone, from the arcade addict to the simulation symbiont.

It'd be nice to unwrap a big box and find everything on this list inside. Nice, but unlikely. So walk through the guide, circle one or two, and leave the magazine where it won't be missed. Then sit back and see what Santa brings.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK CORDELLE

'Tis The Season To Be Playing

Bane of the Cosmic Forge

BANE MAY LOOK A BIT worn next to Might and Magic III, but it surrenders nothing to any point-of-view dungeon game.

You'll find the amount of detail staggering. Add a flexible magic system

Bane of the Cosmic Forge: a classic in the making.

and a huge dungeon that's full of original puzzles and an impressive bestiary, and you've got a classic in the making.

The Cosmic Forge, a magical pen that changes reality with its writing, has been captured by an evil king and a dastardly archimage. They turned on each other (surprise!) and their castle hasn't been quiet since. The multiple endings are sure to surprise you, leading to multiple beginnings in the Bane sequel, Crusaders of the Dark Savant (a future VGA feast to rival Might and Magic III).

Bane of the Cosmic Forge is sure to keep any fantasy role player occupied well into the New Year.

CD-ROM Drive

IT DOESN'T MATTER what **CD-ROM drive** you buy — not really. Just get someone to buy one for you this holiday season.

A CD-ROM drive is slow, really slow compared to a hard-disk drive — but it's like a hard disk on steroids. With space for hundreds of megabytes of programs, graphics images, sound, music, and even snips of video, CD-ROM is going to be part of your gaming future.

Companies such as Broderbund and Sierra have CD-ROM discs in the works. Other publishers are just itching to get into the fray with interactive adventures and dazzling science-fiction games. All it takes is enough CD-ROM drives.

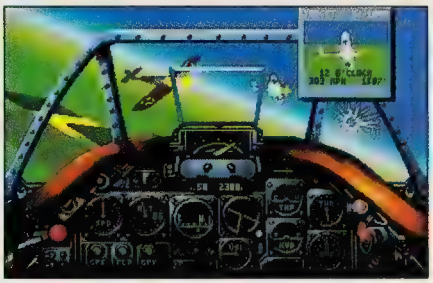
Tandy's $400 internal drive is an affordable example; it's also one of the few that meets the embryonic MPC (multimedia PC) standard. You'll easily find other drives from companies such as Sony and NEC from mail-order sellers. Some computer makers are even beginning to stick them into their new machines.

If you're a diehard gamer who wants to keep up with PC fun during the rest of the decade, get a CD-ROM drive now.

Chuck Yeager's Air Combat

IF VARIETY IS THE SPICE of life, **Chuck Yeager's Air Combat** must be cayenne pepper.

Whether you feel like pumping .50-caliber rounds into a FW 190A that's



Go for the thrills with Chuck Yeager's Air Combat.

diving for the deck, or itch for a radar lock on some hot-shot in a MiG, this game's for you.

World War II, Korea, and Vietnam — Chuck Yeager's been there, and he wants to take you with him, in six different airplanes. This simulator offers some of the smoothest animation in the business, and the ability to create your own cross-temporal scenarios is like an insurance policy against boredom.

Just how many Me-109s does it take to bring down an F-86 Sabre? Fly with Yeager and you'll find out.

Civilization

NOT EVEN ALEXANDER the Great got to play with an empire like this one.

Civilization, a simulation of such grand scope that it runs across more than 6000 years of human history, starts you out as the leader of a wandering tribe. You need to settle down, build cities, discover everything from iron working to nuclear physics,

Control society for over 6000 years in Civilization.

and beat the other cultures into outer space.

The game's point-and-click interface quickly has you exploring your randomly generated planet, fighting off barbarians, making treaties with your allies, and invading the neighboring continents with your vast armies and navies.

Civilization's not for arcade wimps — it demands time and incredible amounts of practice to do much more than suffer utter defeat — but no other game lets you take a walk through humankind's climb up the food chain like this simulation.

Falcon 3.0

FLY YOUR F-16 FIGHTING Falcon low and fast with this much-talked-about and long-awaited simulation — **Falcon 3.0**.

Geared for expert and amateur alike, there's something here for every military aircraft fan. Fly missions right out of yesterday's news as you soar over Kuwait, Israel, or Panama; use laser-guided smart

bombs to stop advancing armies; or clear the skies of enemy aircraft in gut-wrenching dogfights.

Start a campaign and lead an entire squadron in a war in which the outcome of one mission affects the next. You choose who flies and how often. And you better keep an eye on supplies or you'll be in big trouble.

Unmatched VGA graphics, great sound support, a modem-to-modem option, a mission recorder, and the ability to create your own scenarios make Falcon 3.0 an end-of-the-year winner that'll take you into '92 in style.

FlightStick & GameCard III

GREAT GAME PLAYERS need great tools. One you can't do without is a joystick.

CH Products' **FlightStick** is one of the best you can wrap your fingers around. Perfect for flying Red Baron or Falcon 3.0, outstanding in the arcade action of Wing Commander II, even awesome in Test Drive III, FlightStick is stable enough to stay in place, rugged enough to take abuse, and accurate enough to finesse the deadliest opponent.

But the FlightStick can't do it all alone. Most PCs come without a game port, so you'll need an add-on game card, too. CH's **GameCard III** sets itself to the speed of your machine automatically — up to 33 megahertz — and includes two joystick ports for some mean one-on-one game play.

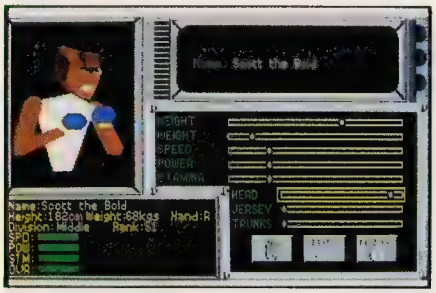
Combine the FlightStick and GameCard III and you're ready to tackle any joystick game.

4D Sports Boxing, With TruVision

KNOCK HIS BLOCK OFF! Give 'em the old one-two! Jab, jab, jab!

If the closest you've been to a ring is the one in your bathtub, you can still step in and duke it out with **4D Sports Boxing**, a futuristic game that TKOs the competition.

4D Sports Boxing may look



Knock his or her block off in 4D Sports Boxing.

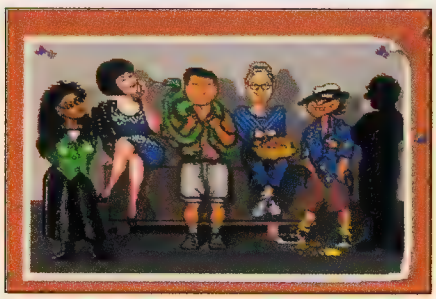
strange, but it's the smoothest-playing sports game around, and the best boxing game ever. Using the same filled-polygon shapes you've come to know and love in flying and driving simulators, 4D's fighters bob and weave, and jab and punch, faster than even Ali dreamed of.

You get to build your boxer, measure him (or her, for female pugilists are allowed) against the opposition, and listen for the bell to ring. Outstanding perspectives literally put the glove in your face.

Take a swing at someone's chin this holiday, but only if you're playing 4D. You never know who's watching.

Headline Harry and the Great Paper Race

IF YOU REALLY WANT TO stop the presses this holiday season, stuff your favorite PC gamer's stocking with Headline Harry and the Great



Headline Harry is fun for kids and adults.

Paper Race. This richly entertaining program from Davidson & Associates may be aimed at kids aged 10 and up, but parents can have just as much fun with the program's imaginative and humorous treatment of newsmaking events from the past 40 years.

Working for the *U.S. Daily Star*, you fly around the country, interview people, and collect facts about a lead story. Problem is, you don't have a clue which story you should be following. And Marvin Muckraker, publisher of the yellow-sheet *Diabolical Daily*, ups the ante by sicking one of his sleazy staff members on you. It's a problem-solving, geographical, historical, and cultural bonanza.

This winter, forget the fireplace and the La-Z-Boy. Instead, get out there and grab some headlines yourself. Imagine: *FAMILY HAS FUN, LEARNS TOO!*

Lemmings

BE CAREFUL IF YOU BUY this game. We mean it. We used to be young, relatively attractive people. Now we've got gray hair and glazed eyeballs that frighten household pets and small children.

Keeping the Lemmings safe will drive you crazy.

Addictive isn't the word for this game from Psygnosis. *Obsessive* — yeah, that's the one.

The trick is to guide a crowd of Lemmings to safety by handing some of them special digging, climbing, or other powers. Once they start falling off cliffs and walking into lakes, they've got you in their grip. It doesn't take long to fall in love with 'em, and the stunning graphics images just make matters worse.

Lemmings is one of those games

that you'll find leaning seductively from your shelf long after you think you've gotten over it. Just don't say we didn't warn you.

Might and Magic III: Isles of Terra

THIS GAME DOES FOR computerized fantasy role play what Wing Commander II does for space games: It ups the ante.

An impressively elegant VGA window shows a true first-person perspective, complete with animated monsters, immolating fireballs, and crackling lightning bolts. Digitized speech and wonderful sound effects, as well as orchestral-quality music for Roland owners, add atmosphere.

Not that substance is ignored: **Might and Magic III** takes you into the sunlight of Terra, where you'll encounter a richly detailed world waiting for a strong sword arm and some timely enchantment. Rescue the world from the evil designs of Sheltem, your nemesis from earlier episodes.

The quickest way to a computer-fantasy role player's heart isn't through the stomach, but through Might and Magic III.

Mike Ditka Ultimate Football

YOU CAN NEVER GET enough football. The sport may be all over the tube, but that's not enough. You need it on your PC monitor, too.

Mike Ditka Ultimate Football edges out the opposing line with superior graphics, a full set of play-making features, and a passing game that — unlike most other PC pigskin games — actually works. You set up in the pocket or roll out, then freeze the action momentarily to spot the open receiver before throwing the ball.

Everything else in the game is just as accessible, whether you're on defense or offense. Multiple camera views keep the sights interesting.

Arcade action isn't everything, though, and Ditka comes through with a from-the-ground-up player-and-play construction set. You can even play a complete season, from

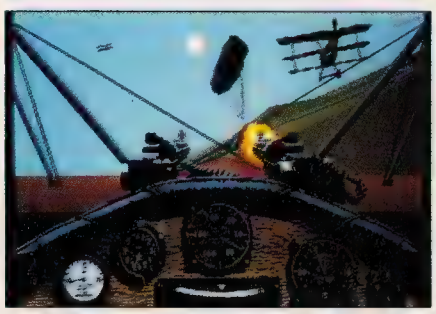
Mike Ditka Football is for fans who can't get enough.

preseason to Super Bowl. Ditka's the perfect gift for anyone who dreads the end of January.

Red Baron

GIFT-WRAP THIS GAME in a silk scarf and send along a leather cap with a pair of old flight goggles.

Red Baron is a trip back to the time when the wind whistled through your open cockpit and sheets of fabric stretched over wood-frame wings. Much more than a flight simulator,



Make yourself the star in Red Baron.

Red Baron is like being the star of a movie about WWI air combat.

You can fly single missions for practice, dogfight famous aces (each with his own style), or try a career with either the British Royal Air Force or the German Luftstreitkrafte. But whether you're busting reconnaissance balloons, hunting Zeppelins, or patrolling the front, you'd better watch your back — you never know who's going to come smoking out of the sun with his guns blazing. Was that a flash of red you saw on that triplane?

Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe

THIS WAS WORTH THE wait. The long-delayed sequel to Their Finest Hour, **Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe** jams the European air war into your PC. If you're not careful, you'll play it almost as long as the real thing lasted.

Not only do you fly re-creations of American and German aircraft — including the B-17, P-51, FW-190,

THEY WERE FAST. THEY WERE DEADLY. THEY WERE OUTNUMBERED! THEY WERE THE
SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE
by LAWRENCE HOLLAND
LUCASFILM

Secret Weapons brings European air war to your PC.

and Me-262 — in some of the most accurate and action-packed air combat this side of reality, but you get to guide the entire campaign from either side. Pick targets, squint through the bombsight of a Flying Fortress, and destroy the Nazi war machine. Or plot assaults on the bomber formations, then rise up to meet Mustangs and Thunderbolts in the rocket-sled Me-163 or piston-powered Me-109. Your expertise affects the course of the war.

For the ultimate challenge, you can take on a tour of duty. Fly 25

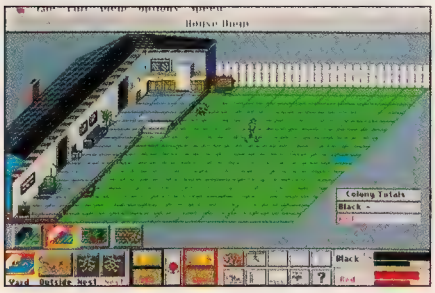
missions, if you can, with your B-17; or down 200 Allied aircraft from behind the guns of a Luftwaffe fighter.

Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe may not be a great title, but it *is* a great game.

SimAnt

YOU RULE YOUR UNIverse. You direct food gathering, teach your subjects to avoid or battle enemies, and scatter forth your minions to colonize and conquer . . . the backyard?

SimAnt from Maxis gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "economy



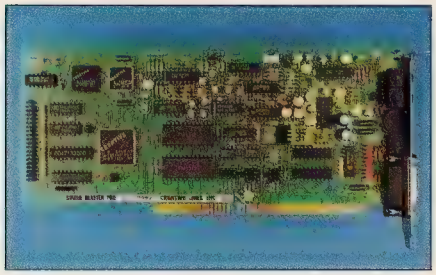
SimAnt: Lead a campaign of a different kind.

of scale." You take over one ant and guide your colony of black ants using carefully placed pheromone trails. Watch out for spiders, red-ant colonies, and those big-footed humans who have a nasty habit of stepping on your brood. You can concentrate your efforts on a single anthill, or you can wage an all-out campaign to take over the backyard or even the house! If you've always wanted an ant farm, but hated to get sand in the kitchen, here's your chance.

Sound Blaster Pro

COMPUTER GAMES MAY have been like silent films once, but no longer — almost every good game features multi-instrumental music and effects. To hear those great extras, though, you need a great sound card.

Sound Blaster Pro is a 16-bit PC card that installs easily, and plays both Sound Blaster and AdLib soundtracks — useful in games such as Might and Magic III, in which the musical programming is much better in one format than the other. Signal response



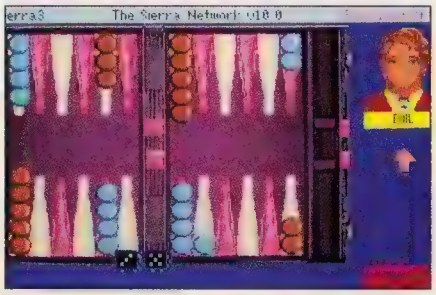
Pump up the volume with Sound Blaster Pro.

on this card is excellent, with almost unnoticeable hiss and distortion. Sound Blaster Pro also includes *FM Intelligent Organ*, which turns your keyboard into an easy-to-program stereo organ; and *Sp Pro*, an excellent MIDI sequencer that lets you combine up to 64 tracks. This holiday season, help someone pump up the volume.

The Sierra Network

LINE ONE FOR YOU. It's the future of electronic entertainment calling. **The Sierra Network** may not be the first out the on-line gaming gate, but if it pulls off what's now on the drawing board, it's got a good shot at grabbing the reins.

Starting out small and slow, TSN



The Sierra Network is breaking new ground.

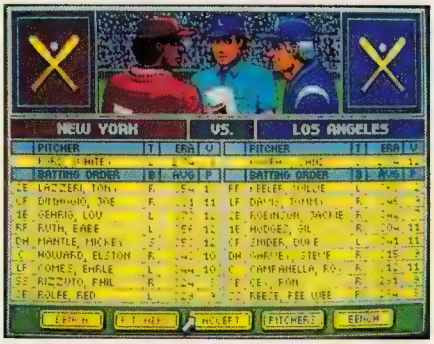
débuted with ho-hum board and card games such as checkers, backgammon, and chess. You went on line, hunted up an opponent from a common waiting area, and tossed down a challenge. So far, nothing's new.

But sometime after the first of the year, TSN plans to break new ground with theme-park-like sections where you play on-line versions of Stellar Seven and Red Baron, where kids connect to do homework together, where mom and dad walk into a cyberspace-style Larry Land for some mildly risqué fun.

TSN may be a big risk for big-name software publisher Sierra On-Line, but it's got the potential to be the Prodigy of on-line entertainment.

Tony LaRussa's Ultimate Baseball

OKAY, SO IT'S WINTER. We know that the basketball and hockey seasons are heating up, and that football teams are gearing up for the playoffs. So what are we doing putting a baseball game in our holiday gift guide? Okay, spring training may be a couple of months away still —



It's always baseball season with Tony LaRussa.

but as every true fan knows, it's *always* baseball season.

If you're a PC gamer who's easily addicted to the national pastime, step up to the plate and take a few swings with SSI's **Tony LaRussa's Ultimate Baseball**. Whether you're into cerebral managerial tactics or arcade athleticism, this ball game covers the bases. Is it the best PC baseball game hands down? Maybe not. What swayed the vote is the unique and effective approach the game takes to judging fly balls — not bad for a company famous for dungeons and dragons.

'Tis The Season To Be Playing

Where in America's Past Is Carmen Sandiego?

WHERE'S THIS DAME gonna show up next? She's been around the world, skipped through Europe and the U.S., and even messed with time. Now she's stealing our history. Well, that's the last straw.

Using the same well-worn techniques of its four predecessors, **Where in America's Past Is Carmen Sandiego?**

This episode of Carmen teaches American history.

puts kids on the trail of a gang of thieves stealing cultural artifacts and icons in a 200-year crime spree. You bop through time and space, following the clues you uncover in your travels. Along the way, you learn about American history and geography.

This episode keeps the Carmen philosophy alive on the PC. Kids like Carmen because it's fun; parents like the idea of its undercover learning. Everybody wins.

For some after-the-holidays fun — and a great reason for parents and kids to gather together around the PC — it's hard to beat this blast from the past.

Wing Commander II: Vengence of the Kilrathi

IT'S EXPENSIVE, IT occupies more than 20 megabytes of your hard-disk drive, but it's worth every dollar and every byte.

Picking up where Wing Commander's Secret Missions 2: The Crusade left off, you play a starfighter jockey trying to prove that those were Kilrathi stealth fighters that finished off the Tiger's Claw. Along the way you're supposed to toast as many Kilrathi ships as possible and figure out who the real traitor is aboard the TCS *Concordia*.

Speech, stunning smoother-than-Wing-Commander VGA graphics, terrific sound, and rousing music show you what your 386SX and 1 megabyte of RAM can do. New fighters, new enemies, and better artificial intelligence for wingmen and enemy pilots promise any Wing Commander veteran unabated terror.

With a dramatically expanded storyline (and a more believable one, too), **Wing Commander II** seems poised for CD-ROM. But first it better be headed your way for the holidays.

Wordtris

WORDTRIS COMES closer to duplicating Tetris' addictive play as any dropping-object clone out there. And that means we're singing its praises.

Rather than play with shapes, though, you watch letters fall as you frantically try to form words instead of filling spaces randomly. How are your spelling and vocabulary skills, anyway? Wordtris will put them to the test.

Letters come to rest in the middle of the screen as if they were floating. When you pile another letter on top, it pushes the first one down. When you complete a word, it disappears to give you more room.

Wordtris has the same captivating

The word for the holidays is Wordtris.

game play, different game modes, and increasingly challenging levels that made its ancestor so successful.

You can guarantee some happy faces — and get everyone eager to tackle spelling and build their vocabulary at the same time — if you put Wordtris under the tree. It may be a little tough to get everyone to the table for dinner, though. ❑

Contributing to PCGames' *holiday gift guide were Barry Brenesal, Cameron Crotty, Cynthia Field, Gregg Keizer, Lafe Low, Dan Muse, Richard Sheffield, and Bernie Yee.*

PRODUCT INFORMATION

Bane of the Cosmic Forge
Sir-Tech Software
P.O. Box 245
Ogdensburg Business Center
Suite 2E
Ogdensburg, NY 13669
(315) 393-6644
$59.95
640K IBM PC or compatible
Hercules, CGA, EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color
supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, SoundMaster, VoiceMaster sound boards

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Hunt Valley, MD 21030
(301) 771-1151
$59.95 (EGA, MCGA, Tandy), $69.95 (VGA)
640K IBM PC or compatible
EGA, MCGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color

supports AdLib, Roland MT32, Sound Blaster sound boards
requires hard-disk drive
mouse recommended

Falcon 3.0

Spectrum HoloByte
2061 Challenger Drive
Alameda, CA 94501
(415) 522-0107
$69.95
640K IBM PC or compatible (10MHz 286 minimum)
EGA, VGA
supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Roland sound boards, Tandy sound
requires hard-disk drive
extended memory recommended

FlightStick, $79.95 GameCard III, $49.95

CH Products
970 Park Center Drive
Vista, CA 92083
(619) 598-2518

4D Sports Boxing with TruVision

Electronic Arts
1820 Gateway Drive
San Mateo, CA 94404
(415) 571-7171
$49.95
640K IBM PC or compatible
CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA
supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards, Tandy DAC, Tandy 3-voice sound
hard-disk drive recommended
off-disk copy protection

Headline Harry and the Great Paper Race

Davidson & Associates
P.O. Box 2961
Torrance, CA 90509
(800) 545-7677
$49.95 (16-color)
$59.95 (256-color)
512K IBM PC or compatible (16-color), 640K IBM PC or compatible (256-color)
Hercules, CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color (16-color), VGA, MCGA (256-color)
supports AdLib, Sound Blaster sound boards, Tandy, PS/1 sound

Lemmings

Psygnosis, Ltd.
29 St. Mary's Court
Brookline, MA 02146
(617) 731-3553
$49.99
512K IBM PC or compatible
CGA, EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color
supports AdLib, Sound Blaster sound boards
mouse recommended

Might and Magic III: Isles of Terra

New World Computing
20301 Ventura Boulevard
Suite 200
Woodland Hills, CA 91364
(818) 999-0606
$59.95
640K IBM PC or compatible
EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color
supports AdLib, Sound Blaster sound boards, Tandy 3-voice sound

Mike Ditka Ultimate Football

Accolade
550 S. Winchester Boulevard
San Jose, CA 95128
(408) 985-1700
$54.95
640K IBM PC or compatible (10MHz or faster recommended)
EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color
supports AdLib, Roland sound boards

Red Baron

Dynamix/Sierra On-Line
P.O. Box 485
Coarsegold, CA 93614
(800) 326-6654
$59.95
640K IBM PC or compatible (10MHz minimum)
VGA (separate 256- and 16-color version available)
supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards

Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe

Lucasfilm Games
P.O. Box 10307
San Rafael, CA 94912
(800) 782-7927
$69.95
640 K IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster recommended)
EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color
supports AdLib, Sound Blaster sound boards

SimAnt

Maxis Software
Two Theatre Square
Suite 230
Orinda, CA 94563-3041
(415) 254-9700
$59.95

Sound Blaster Pro

Creative Labs, Inc.
2050 Duane Avenue
Santa Clara, CA 95054
(408) 986-1461
$299.95
512K IBM PC or compatible
CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA

The Sierra Network

Sierra On-Line
P.O. Box 485
Coarsegold, CA 93614
(800) 743-7721
$11.95/month in selected areas of California;
$4.95/month plus $2/hour (6 p.m. to 6 a.m.) elsewhere
640K IBM PC or compatible (286 or faster)
EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color
Hayes-compatible modem (1200-bps minimum)

Where in America's Past Is Carmen Sandiego?

Broderbund Software
17 Paul Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903-2101
(415) 492-3200
$59.95
512K IBM PC or compatible (Hercules, CGA, EGA, Tandy 16-color), 640K (VGA, MCGA)
supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, PS/1 Sound Card, Roland MT-32, LAPC-1, CM-32L sound boards, Tandy sound
requires hard-disk drive

Wing Commander II: The Vengeance of the Kilrathi

Origin Systems
P.O. Box 161750
Austin, TX 78716
(512) 328-5490
$79.95
640K IBM PC or compatible
EGA, VGA, MCGA
requires hard-disk drive (more than 12MB free)
16MHz or faster recommended

Wordtris

Spectrum HoloByte
2061 Challenger Drive
Alameda, CA 94501
(415) 522-3584
$39.95
640K IBM PC or compatible
CGA, EGA, VGA

MEGA PC

What's your idea of the ultimate game computer? Get ready to play the hottest new software titles — from video to sound to CD-ROM, here's the scoop on the peripherals and components that can turn your dream machine into reality.

CANNOT INSTALL PROGRAM. NOT enough space on drive C:. Expansion memory not detected. No music will play. 386 processor not found. Program will not run at optimal speed. VGA card not detected.

Just what is your computer trying to pull?

These are the installation blues that try our souls. You may have seen some already. If you haven't, just wait, they're out there — or they will be soon — waiting for you to run a fast game on a machine that only jogs; play a flashy game on a machine that thinks 16 colors are God's palette; or jump into a big game on a machine with a small soul.

Maybe, just maybe, you can free up enough space on the hard drive by eliminating a few unused drivers, and maybe, just maybe, you can knock out a few memory-resident programs that are devouring your machine's paltry 640K of RAM. Maybe. Or maybe this desperate search for free space and free memory is a clue that you're bumping up against the limits of your system, that it's time to think about upgrading to a more powerful machine — or upgrading a system component or two to make your already-powerful machine into a game-playing Hercules.

Upgrade: The Dirty Word

YOU THOUGHT *PCGAMES* DIDN'T SLIP DIRTY WORDS into its pages, didn't you? Wrong. Here's one that can curl your hair: *upgrade*. Definition: 1. *To spend a ton of money on advanced computer technology to play sophisticated games.* 2. *To do it all over again three or four years later.*

If you take your game play seriously, it's probably time to upgrade. PC technology has reached one of those breakpoints where the cutting edge gets suddenly sharper. A system running on a 12MHz (megahertz) 286 chip — two years ago the king of PC games — is not only at the the bottom of the technological ladder, but may drop off the last rung at almost any moment.

BY PETER OLAFSON

ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD ANDERSON

A LOW-END OR A HIGH-END DREAM MACHINE? PCGAMES CAN HELP YOU SORT OUT WHICH SYSTEM IS RIGHT FOR YOU.

True enough, loaded 286 machines are available for less than $900. But prices on faster 386-based PCs are falling like autumn leaves, and a number of game developers are gearing their hottest products to 386 machines. Origin is a perfect example. Both Ultima VII and Strike Commander require a minimum of 2 megabytes of memory, with Strike Commander recommending at least a 20MHz 386. Get the impression someone's trying to tell you something?

Don't panic. No one's pushing you around. You may not have to upgrade here and now. If you read *PCGames*, you probably have a decent PC game machine, and there will be plenty of titles to feed it for some time to come. A fast (12 to 16MHz) 286 with a megabyte or more of memory, a 40-megabyte hard disk, and a VGA monitor and card will keep your finger on the fun button awhile longer.

The issue of whether or not to upgrade also depends on your gaming habits. If you love simulations, which rely on heavy computational power, the faster your PC the better. You should have upgraded yesterday. But if you think flying's for the birds, and you're more comfortable with the "strength 15/charisma 2" kind of game, your 12MHz 286 may suffice still, because role-play and adventure games tend to demand less of your PC's processor.

But if you want to play with the big boys, you're going to need a big machine. Your middle-of-the-road PC just won't make it. There's simply no pang quite like the pang of holding a game box in your hands, and realizing (from your careful examination of the on-the-box sticker) that you don't have enough computer to play.

PCGames is here to help. We've come up with two configurations for would-be upgraders — a low end and a high end, with lots of room in between — that will keep you current until . . . well, until the next time the cutting edge gets sharper.

Which End Is Up?

THE LOW-END PC DREAM MACHINE IS A 386SX computer that includes a 16 or 20MHz microprocessor, an 80-megabyte hard-disk drive, 2 megabytes of memory, a VGA monitor and card, a 2400-bps (bits per second, or *baud*) modem, and an AdLib or Sound Blaster sound card. Nearly a standard configuration for dedicated game players, this machine is the low end only because it's not quite as loaded as the high end. It's nevertheless a solid system that should be able to run every game and its sequel for at least the next year-and-a-half to two years. Price: about $2000, give or take a couple of hundred.

The high-end game machine is a 386 with a 33MHz CPU, 4 megabytes of memory, a 128K RAM cache, a 200-megabyte hard disk, a super VGA monitor and an SVGA card with a megabyte of its own memory, a 9600-bps modem, a Roland sound board, and a CD-ROM drive. Not only will this system play the newest and most technologically demanding games in all their glory, but it makes generous allowances for the future. You should be able to put this classy model together for somewhere between $3000 and $3500.

Even at those prices, both machines include high-density 3.5-inch (1.44-megabyte) and 5.25-inch (1.2-megabyte) floppy-disk drives, and a solid joystick. And though it will add a bit to the bottom line, you'll be better off with a minitower case that leaves you plenty of space for future expansion, and gets the computer off your desktop and onto the floor, where it belongs.

Before you get started, there are a couple of game-related options to consider. One is a math coprocessor, available for around $120 or so for the 386SX and $200 for the 386. Very few (if any) games support the Intel 80387 math coprocessor at the moment, but Spectrum HoloByte's Falcon 3.0 requires one for its most sophisticated flight model. If you're moving 386-ward principally to play that much-awaited flight simulator, keep a coprocessor in mind.

The other options are in the system-software arena. If you buy a complete system from most manufacturers, the computer will probably come with either DOS 4.01 or DOS 5.0 installed. The former works fine (and has the added advantage of long use, and it's relatively free of bugs), but DOS 5.0 (available for $50 to $60) has some very nice functions — notably a memory manager that lets you load parts of the operating system into high RAM (that portion of memory between 640K and 1 megabyte), leaving at least 610K of the lower 640K open for that new game you're stuffing into your machine.

The third option is Microsoft Windows 3.0 (priced around $80, or $20 to $30 more if it comes with the Microsoft mouse). Like DOS, Windows may come bundled with your system. Though Windows games are few and far between, a handful of Windows-compatible games are coming. And there's a whole packet of

shareware and public-domain products — from adventures to shoot-'em-ups to the inevitable Tetris clones — that make use of Windows. (Watch for a Windows-games feature in the next issue of *PCGames*.)

While you all sit back and harrumph indignantly over this — it's not every day someone tells you to spend three grand to play games — keep this bit of advice uppermost in mind. Shop around. Please. There's a bewildering range of 386 systems on the market, and price differences are as vast as the Great Plains. Also note that you can often save a bundle of money and lots of time by shopping for a packaged system from companies that put everything together for you. What follows isn't a buyer's guide — you have to fight the monitor-dot-pitch and DRAM-chip wars yourself, unfortunately — but is simply a buyer's *guideline*. The prices quoted here are estimates based on what it would cost to buy the components separately, and so may be artificially high.

Ramming Speed

LET'S GET RIGHT TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER: the computer's microprocessor. Speed never hurts — unless you're playing public-domain games made in 1983. Remember, you're buying a race car, and while you want to make sure it's streamlined, tuned-up, and the right color, the engine is what makes it go. That engine should be a 386.

If you follow the glossy covers of the major PC magazines, you may be tempted to ask, "What about this 486 I keep hearing about? Shouldn't I get that? Isn't that the top of the line?"

It sure is. And the 80486 enjoys some advantages over its ancestors — notably, a built-in math coprocessor and RAM cache. But as the top-of-the-line chip, it's also notably more expensive. In fact, that price difference is in good part responsible for the plummet in 386 costs.

For games, the 386 is clearly the way to go. Available at speeds ranging from 16MHz to a whopping 40MHz, the 386 makes everything whiz along at speeds you may not have imagined. If you're used to 8 and 12MHz 286 speeds, you'll think some games have been re-invented. Things like frame rate — always a critical consideration with simulators — don't mean a whole lot on a full-bore 386; it turns slow motion-like screen updates into seamless flight.

It's difficult to give a price here, as you may be buying a new machine that includes the hardware. If you're just upgrading some of your internals, however, you can expect to spend at least $400 for a 386SX motherboard and about $100 more for a 33MHz 386 board — perhaps a little more if it includes a built-in RAM cache.

At the same time, you may also want to look into utilities to, believe it or not, actually slow down your machine. This doesn't make sense until you remember those old favorites you whip out now and again. Imagine playing something like Loderunner at 33MHz and you get the idea. Several public-domain programs pull this trick nicely — the one that comes immediately to mind is ATslow, which you should be able to find easily enough on electronic bulletin boards or via shareware and public-domain disk collections.

WITH A 386 MICRO-PROCESSOR YOUR SYSTEM WILL HAVE THE ENGINE IT NEEDS TO GIVE YOU THE SPEED YOU WANT.

In Living Color

AFTER SPEED COMES COLOR. TODAY'S GAMES LOOK better than ever. Four-color CGA displays are a thing of the past, and EGA will probably follow shortly. All first-run games support VGA/MCGA, with several using it exclusively.

You'll need two components to move up to living color — a monitor and a graphics card. Stick with VGA (a resolution of at least 640 x 480) for the low-end, and super VGA (SVGA, with resolution from 800 x 600 to 1024 x 768) or extended VGA (XVGA, 1024 x 768) for the high-end machine.

Monitor shopping can be, in itself, as difficult as computer shopping. Prices vary so much that you can spend easily as much for a high-end monitor and card as you'll drop on the rest of the system combined.

Keep your budget out of the stratosphere by spending around $300 for a solid VGA monitor, or $400 for a SVGA screen. Graphics cards for either — with a minimum of 256K of built-in memory — can be had for as little as $70. Add another $50 or so to boost the SVGA's memory to the suggested 1 megabyte and you'll get faster response.

Memories

DON'T FORGET SYSTEM MEMORY. EVEN IF YOU'RE not really listening, and want the absolutely stingiest, bare-bones machine, you're going to need 640K of RAM. (When was the last time you saw 512K required for a game?) And publishers are

Continued on Page 50

The Simpsons are in a bind, and it's up to you to bail them out in two new blockbuster computer games from Konami.®

The Simpsons™ Arcade Game brings home all the action and humor of the original arcade hit. With Homer, Marge, Bart and Lisa racing to reunite the family after Maggie's nabbed during a jewel heist. Pick your favorite family member and charge through all eight arcade levels and both hilarious bonus stages. Krustyland, Springfield Discount Cemetery, Moe's Tavern, it's all here. Including vibrant 3-D scenes, Bart's digitized voice, music inspired by the TV series, and original Simpsons animation.

Clobber hordes of bad dudes and bizarre enemies using each character's unique attack move, as well as patented tandem attacks. Hurl whatever's

Your contribution can give hope to a desperate family

Available
Fall 1991
MS-DOS and C64.

handy, like sidewalk signs, trash bins, even cats, dogs and raccoons. Each level ends with an especially fiendish foe like a bionic Mr. Burns, or a giant Krusty the Clown head. Pair up with a friend and double the Simpsons' chances of survival. Do your part to bring America's most animated family back together again.

Bart's in trouble, man. The whole Simpsons house is weirded out. And it's up to you to help him find the coolest item in the universe in his own action/adventure, **Bart's House of Weirdness.**™ Featuring Bart's digitized voice, music inspired by the TV show and The Simpsons' very own warped sense of humor.

Become Bart and enter six weird worlds attached to your room. Choose your paths and journey through the Simpsons' spooky attic, treacherous backyard, the haunted burial ground, a wild nightmare starring Itchy and Scratchy and more. Gain special powers by finding the three cool objects you need to enter the Radical Zone, home of the all-time coolest thing in existence. Along the way grab radical weapons you'll need like the Burp Gun, Water Balloon, Spray Paint Can and others. Your adventure's filled with notorious Simpsons ne'er-do-wells, including Ms. Botz the baby sitter, the Space Mutants and Sideshow Bob. Be sure to maintain your Cool Factor by gobbling up donuts. Any false move will definitely cost you coolness, but forge ahead, man, and help out everyone's favorite troubled youth.

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already cranking out games that either demand expanded memory — Origin, which pushes the technology envelope as hard as anyone, comes immediately to mind with its Wing Commander, Savage Empire, and Martian Dreams titles — or at the least make good use of it.

The 2 megabytes in the 386SX system keeps you covered. The 4 megabytes in the 386 keeps you covered longer (and makes allowances for Windows and Windows games, which are really cramped in a double-megabyte machine). RAM prices are on a downhill turn, so you shouldn't have to pay more than $50 per megabyte.

The high-end game machine should also include a 128K RAM cache. This fast memory stores the most frequently used parts of programs, speeding up your computer's speed by as much as 10 to 12 percent. Price? About $400. If you're building your own system or upgrading an older machine, you may want to forego a cache; almost all 33MHz 386 systems come with one, though.

IF YOU DON'T HAVE A HARD-DISK DRIVE, YOU NEED ONE. IF YOU ALREADY HAVE A HARD-DISK DRIVE, YOU NEED A BIGGER ONE.

Wide-Open Spaces

YOU NEED SOME PLACE TO PUT THESE GREAT GAMES you'll play. That brings up hard-disk drives, and a bit more bad news.

If you don't have a hard-disk drive, you need one. If you already have a hard disk, you need a bigger one. That 20-megabyte drive can't cut it anymore. Even 30- and 40-megabyte drives are going to come up short soon.

You used to pack a hard-disk drive full with 720K to 1-megabyte games, but that's changed. Now some games can swallow an entire 20-megabyte hard-disk drive and still be hungry. When you add the Sound Blaster speech module to Origin's Wing Commander II, for instance, you need about 22 megabytes. The VGA version of Sierra's King Quest V takes up 10.7 megabytes. An early version of Dynamix's The Adventures of Willie Beamish ate nearly 9, and it wasn't even complete. The facts are clear: Games are getting bigger, much bigger.

That's why you need to equip your game-playing PC, low-end or high-end, with a robust hard-disk drive — 80 megabytes for the less-expensive system, and 200 megabytes for the top-of-the-line machine. Eighty megabytes provides enough room to keep a half-dozen mammoth games on board, while still leaving 20 megabytes or so for your system software, utilities, and those other programs you use when you're not looking for Carmen Sandiego, flying an F-16, or fighting your way through dank dungeons.

The 200-megabyte drive may seem like a luxury now, but it'll certainly prevent those *Drive C: is full* messages. (Remember, though, that's still only about 10 Wing Commander II-sized games.) Think of it as a necessity for the dedicated gamer who plans to do anything serious with the machine. And, like the 4 megabytes of memory in the 386, the 200-megabyte hard-disk drive gives you room to grow.

What's the bottom line on drives? Expect to pay about $300 for an 80-megabyte drive, and about twice that for a 200-megabyte device.

Another footnote: For those on a tight budget, there may be a cheaper way to handle huge games and limited disk space. Stacker (from Stac Electronics) is a software utility that compresses data to effectively double the capacity of your hard-disk drive. A more expensive version includes a plug-in coprocessor card to speed up compression and decompression of the programs as they go on, and come off, the hard-disk drive.

Assume Control

YOU NEED SOME WAY TO CONTROL THE GAMES YOU play. Although virtually all PC games can be controlled from the keyboard, you'll quickly yearn for a mouse or joystick, and a place to plug in the stick.

A mouse comes with many complete systems. If it doesn't, and you're thinking of adding Windows, make sure that you're buying a rodent that's Microsoft compatible, which is the industry standard.

Joysticks, on the other hand, are foreign to PC hardware — you need to buy a separate add-on card to support a joystick. If you go for the Sound Blaster sound board, a game port is built in. If you don't opt for the Sound Blaster, you need a game card, which costs about $50. A good joystick runs anywhere from $30 to $50.

The Music Machine

SOUND BOARDS CALL THE PC TUNE TODAY. GONE are the days when gamers were forced to listen to simplistic squeaks and squawks from the internal speaker. The most common sound board, of course, is the AdLib — an 11-voice synthesizer that enjoys nearly universal support from PC game publishers, and that costs less than $100. The AdLib-compatible Sound Blaster, however, runs only another $50 or so,

and adds speech to selected games, such as Wing Commander II.

For the high-end machine, you may still want to go with Sound Blaster. If you want the very best (and the most expensive), look at Roland's MT-32 and LAPC-1 boards. These top-notch sound boards — with prices in the $400 range — make glorious noise for those who can afford them.

Note that sound is as much a shifting market as anything in the PC world, and that second-generation AdLib and Sound Blaster cards — AdLib Gold and Sound Blaster Pro — are now available, both with impressive specs.

You can route sound and music through headphones, but for best results you'll want external stereo speakers. You have lots of choices here, ranging from inexpensive speakers you can pick up at Radio Shack for around $50 to self-powered boomers in the $200 range.

Community Play

MOST GAMES ARE STAND-ALONES; GAMES YOU PLAY alone or against a computer opponent. But an increasing number can be played either with a pal on another computer, or with dozens of fantasy gamers or pilots over an on-line service.

In addition, the serious game player will want to explore what's available in shareware and public-domain entertainment on electronic bulletin boards or commercial services. The best of the bunch are every bit as good as finished commercial games, and cheap, too. The folks at Texas' Apogee Software, for instance, are doing some remarkable things with their series of superb small-figure arcade games.

To open up this on-line world — whether to play or pull down new games — you need a modem. Don't look at anything less than a 2400-bps modem for the low-end system. That's the standard speed these days; it serves you well whether you're dogfighting or downloading. Prices start around $60.

For the high-end system, you should consider a 9600-bps modem. It's much more expensive — prices range from under $300 to $600 — but also much faster, permitting giant file transfers in a fraction of the time it takes at slower speeds.

Go Laser

TO STAY CURRENT IN PC GAMES, YOU'LL NEED A CD-ROM drive. Maybe not today, maybe not even tomorrow. But sooner than you think.

Include a CD-ROM drive in any high-end system you assemble. The device's huge storage capacity — 660 megabytes or so — and the immense space requirements of the digitized speech and photographic-quality images that accompany the newest games make CD-ROM the future medium of choice. (There's even been talk that the CD-ROM version of Sierra On-Line's King's Quest V will demand two discs.) A number of publishers are working on products that bear little resemblance to the technology that makes your eyes pop now.

And yet, this is one game-system component you might want to omit. There's not much CD game software out at the moment; CD-ROM drive-equipped computers, notably Tandy's, are just hitting the market; and it's likely that prices will continue to drop over the next year or so as more drives reach the home. (See "The Future's Round and Silver," Editor's Page, November 1991, p. 4, for more on this latest trend in computer entertainment systems.)

Even now, though, you can find CD-ROM drives in the just-under-$400 to the over-$650 range through mail-order ads. Tandy's internal drive may be slow, but it's MPC (multimedia PC) compatible and costs just $400. If you want to stay on the cutting edge, and don't mind cutting yourself a bit to be there, take the plunge. It's only money.

And, after all, if something better comes along, you can always upgrade. ❑

SERIOUS GAME PLAYERS SHOULD EXPLORE SHAREWARE AND PUBLIC-DOMAIN ENTERTAIN-MENT — AND THAT MEANS BUYING A MODEM.

FURTHER READING

"Breaking the Sound Barrier"
November/December 1990, p. 18

"Dial F for Fun, P for Play: On-Line Multiplayer Games"
March/April 1991, p. 28

"Sound Source"
Reviews, September/October 1991, p. 48

"Sound Master II"
Reviews, September/October 1991, p. 74

"The Future's Round and Silver"
Editor's Page, November 1991, p. 4

"Dial M for Modem Games"
November 1991, p. 34

"Sound Blaster Pro"
Reviews, November 1991, p. 60

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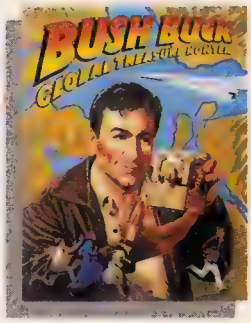

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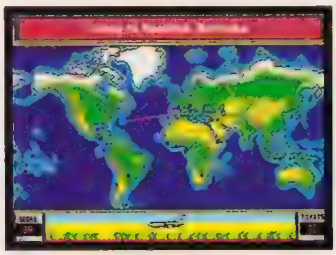

"One of the best educational games we've seen to date."
Gary Meredith, PC Games Strategy Guide

Three increasingly difficult levels of gameplay pit you in a battle of wits against Pierre LeDroop, Natasha Derooshki and the evil Otto himself.

The world's great cultural icons teeter on the brink of oblivion. Are you prepared for the challenge of a lifetime, Bush Buck?

"A wonderful geographical scavenger hunt."
Bob Schwabach, Universal Press Syndicate

PC Globe, Inc.

4700 South McClintock, Tempe, Arizona 85282

For use with IBM® PC/XT/AT/PS2 or compatibles with a minimum of 512K. DOS 2.0+. Supports CGA, Hercules, Tandy, EGA, VGA or color MCGA displays plus the AdLib™ and IBM PS1 sound cards.

Actual game screens from IBM PC/MCGA version of the game. All other versions may vary. ©1991 PC Globe, Inc. All rights reserved. All product and corporate names are trademarks and registered trademarks of their respective owners.

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FALCON 3.0

By Richard Sheffield

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND. So it is with Falcon 3.0, the most detailed and accurate jet-combat simulator ever put on a personal computer.

Spectrum HoloByte's designs have come full circle. The detail and accuracy of Falcon 3.0's predecessors, Falcon and Falcon AT, not only won awards, but also led to a contract to develop desktop F-16 simulators for the United States Air Force. Now the company's bringing that experience back to a game.

It's fortunate that the designers at Spectrum HoloByte have learned a thing or two about entertainment since the first Falcon took to the sky. Though accurate, the original was difficult to fly and seemed aimed only at hard-core simulation fans. Not so this time. Falcon 3.0 offers game play to suit everyone, from beginner to armchair ace.

Instant Action

Much of the credit goes to Falcon 3.0's *Instant Action* mode, a perfect introduction for anyone who yearns to jump right into battle. No fumbling for directions on how to taxi, take off, and find the bad guys here. You're set right in the middle of a serious dogfight, with simplified controls and weapons-targeting commands to make learning quick and easy.

But Falcon's *Campaign* mode makes this simulation. Hostilities erupt in Israel, Panama, or the Persian Gulf — in all, victory or defeat rides with your squadron's performance. Up to eight aircraft take orders from you on each mission, and if the missions sound familiar, well, they should. They're both realistic and based on recent headlines.

Missions even react to your personal performance. Each is based on the success or failure of the previous sortie. Fail to clear the skies of enemy aircraft on one mission and you'll likely find yourself scrambling to intercept bogeys inbound for your base on the next.

Campaign mode also introduces a management problem. You have to choose which squadron members fly which missions, and how often. Fly a guy with a hot hand too often and fatigue catches up with him.

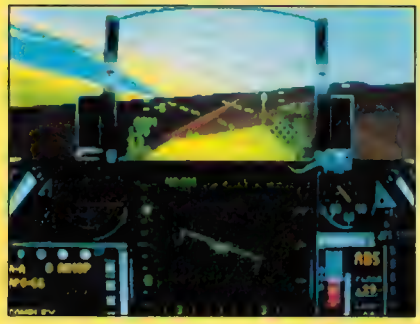
These missions, the core of Falcon 3.0, take place over a 300-square-mile area built in superb detail and based on topographical realities: Finally, a simulation with real mountains and rolling hills. Not only that, but these hills and mountains actually function to screen your aircraft from the prying eyes of enemy radar.

Two other Falcon 3.0 play modes are *Red Flag* and *Communications*. Red Flag puts you in the midst of a training series over Nellis Air Force Base. Not only does Falcon 3.0 hand you several interesting training missions, but you can even design your own. You can create new F-16 missions, or re-create events that actually happened.

Communications mode is the first in a series of games that Spectrum HoloByte has planned for its *Electronic Battlefield* concept. *Communications* allows for modem-to-modem and direct connection currently, so that you can fly in head-to-head combat against a friend, or together as leader and wingman. Future Spectrum HoloByte releases should let you fly with someone else playing the company's A-10 Avenger, an as-yet-unreleased AH-64 Apache helicopter simulation, and perhaps even with M-1 Abrams tank drivers on the ground.

Falcon 3.0

Exterior views help you keep up with your wingman and the enemy.



Fly fast and low over some of the most realistic terrain seen in a simulation.

Heavy on the Hardware

Hardware requirements to support this sophisticated simulation are heavy. Falcon 3.0 gobbles up all the horsepower and extra memory you can throw at it. In fact, a number of

game functions — including *Communications*, the excellent mission recorder, and a *Tactical Aircraft Combat Training System* (TACTS) — won't work at all unless you have substantial RAM set up as extended memory. TACTS shows all the combatants in a three-dimensional cube of space, tracks all aircraft and missiles, and can be viewed from any angle. Now you can finally find out why your missile shot missed.

Falcon 3.0 is also the first game to make use of a math coprocessor. Although it's not required for superb game play, if you have one on your 286 or 386 motherboard (a coprocessor's built into Intel's 80486 microprocessor), you can run the complicated flight model used in the *Advanced Situational Awareness Trainer* that Spectrum HoloByte created for the Air Force. You'll be flying with a model that's only a hair's-breadth away from being classified!

A pushbutton interface and slick animated sequences make Falcon 3.0 much easier to use than its predecessors, and *Instant Action* mode and campaigns make it much more fun. Add its unparalleled accuracy and detail, and Falcon 3.0 is certain to offer something for every air-combat simulation fan.

Spectrum HoloByte, 2061 Challenger Drive, Alameda, CA 94501, (415) 522-0107; IBM PC or compatible (10 MHz 286 minimum); 640K RAM (extended memory recommended); EGA, VGA; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Roland sound boards, Tandy sound; requires hard-disk drive; $69.95

PRO TENNIS TOUR II

By Lafe Low

TENNIS IS IN A TIME WARP. CHAMPIONS don't age as the rest of us do, but simply get younger every year. If tennis isn't careful, it'll turn into the premier sport for prepubescents.

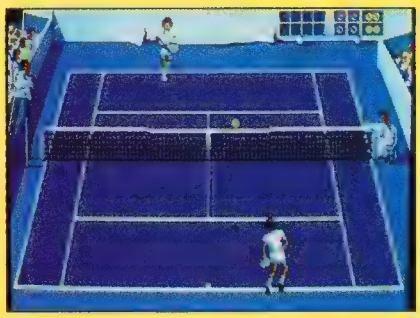
And though we might watch in awe at the athletes' fearlessness at the net, their booming backhands, and their utter dedication to their craft, we probably feel more than a twitch of envy, too. How long could any of us — anyone over 25 anyway — last against one of these clay-court kids?

A long time if you're playing Pro Tennis Tour II. This tennis simulation got it right — it offers up the thrills of tennis without a bead of sweat.

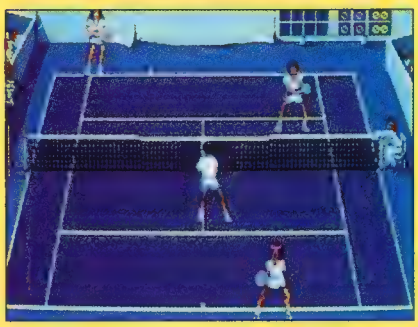
Center-Court Action

Pro Tennis Tour II displays a spectacular full-court view. You see the action from slightly above and behind your player, about as good a perspective as you'll find without actually getting on a court. No "tennis neck" from watching a side view in this game.

Pro Tennis Tour II



You're close to the action wherever you look, thanks to a spectacular full-court view.



Play singles or doubles matches with superb realism.

At the main menu in Pro Tennis Tour II, you choose from a basic array of icons. The first, and most obvious, lets you jump right in and play a match. You should probably look over the manual, learn the shots, and practice with the ball machine first, but you won't. If you're like most gamers, you'll jump right in.

After the obligatory experimental rounds, it's time to get down to business. First you'll want to set up and customize your player's preferences, strengths, and weaknesses. Next, pick your court surface — you can serve, smash, lob, and volley on grass, clay, or asphalt. Then decide whether you'll play singles, a lopsided game of two against one, or doubles.

Your Izod and Adidas-clad on-screen persona can be either male or female, and you'll be able to adjust the difficulty level at which you and your opponent play. The computer can control your opponent, or you can play against another person. Playing against someone else gets crazy, though, unless you have a two-joystick game card. Pounding on the keyboard — a necessary evil in Pro Tennis Tour II — is sure to shorten its lifespan.

Choices at All Levels

Pro Tennis Tour II lets you play at three levels — junior, average, and character — with each level becoming increasingly more difficult. Playing a few sets in junior mode is a great way to improve your shots. The computer moves your feet and you just swing the racquet. And remember to swallow your pride while you practice: Pro Tennis Tour II may not be the real thing, but it still takes skill.

To brush up on your tennis quickly, head for the ball machine. Tennis' equivalent of a gold driving range, the ball machine fires away and you hit back. You can practice any shot for as long as you like, or simply step

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in and hit a few balls. It's perfect when you want to hit, but don't want to get wrapped up in a game.

Tournament Time

Once you've got your tennis feet beneath you, or you've at least played through a couple of matches, you're ready to enter a tournament.

You get to do everything from creating tournament schedules to viewing your stats and those of the other pros. Be ready for some finger-stretching play, though, because tourney play in this game not only taxes your reflexes, but saps your stamina as well.

Along the way, you can check to see how well you're doing. You'll see prowess ratings for specific shots and your record for the game, including details such as the number of successful serves and the percentage of backhands you've returned. This tabulation is a great way to gauge your progress while you're still learning, and often the only positive reinforcement you'll get.

Thrills and Chills — But It's No Sweat

Pro Tennis Tour II is no pushover. You won't be playing like a pro your first session, but then, at least the game lets you pretend you're a pro with a whole lot less work than the real thing.

Add to that the absence of those embarrassing lobs over the court fence, and this game's too good to pass up.

You'll have a blast with Pro Tennis Tour II. The perspective, the multiple options, and the fast action will leave your fingers — but not your knees — tingling.

UbiSoft (distributed by Electronic Arts), 1820 Gateway Avenue, San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM; Hercules, CGA, EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color; joystick recommended; off-disk copy protection; $49.95

GUNSHIP 2000

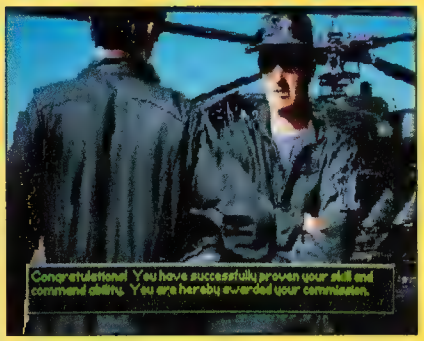
By Ed Ferrell

YOU POP UP FROM BEHIND A DUNE — chopper blades roaring in your ears — and surprise a lone, Russian-built T-80A tank. The computerized target-acquisition system's on, so you fire an air-to-ground Maverick missile. Direct hit. With the burning hulk showing on your multi-function display, you pitch, pull, bank left, and set the internal navigation system for home. Then you take a breath.

But a moment later, alarm signals pierce the cockpit and a blip appears on your threat display — heading right for your tail. The electronic jamming system may help, but you drop some chaff anyway, just so the missile has something else besides you to lock onto. Scissoring your Apache gunship in an evasive maneuver, you try to get the enemy in your sights. You have only one Sidewinder left; better make it count.

Gunship 2000, the newest chopper simulation from MicroProse, puts you in command of modern helicopter gunships on missions just like this. The ultimate goal? Stay alive through a campaign in either the Persian Gulf or Central Europe. Detailed cockpit gauges keep you informed and the scenery out the windows is impressive. Although Gunship 2000 taxes weaker PCs, it's the best helicopter game around.

Gunship 2000



On the ground, you'll receive training before your mission, choose your pilots and your chopper, and look over your orders.

The game's map view lets you plot your flight path and turn on autopilot.

No milk runs here — the action's nonstop. Detailed cockpit gauges keep you informed of your progress and damage.

Missions, More Missions

Gunship 2000's missions vary from flying Apache gunships on search-and-patrols to leading a squadron of heavy-lifting Blackhawks into a hot landing zone. There are no milk runs in Gunship, and any rookie aviator will have his hands full just keeping the bird in the air. The first stop, if you're smart, is Fort Rucker, Alabama, for some training.

More great graphics images appear at *Brigade Headquarters*, where you point-and-select from the *Duty Roster* to pick your pilots, and choose the mission type and theater of battle. You can peruse your mission orders at the *Briefing Tent*, and select your helicopter, and load your ordnance. Take note of the mission's primary

and secondary targets, meteorological data, and the intelligence section's report on enemy strength.

You'll use this information to select your squad's choppers and ordnance. If your primary target is naval, the Penguin missile is your best pick; if you're likely to be landing in a blazing LZ, a mini gun pod for suppressing fire is a a good idea.

Once you're flying level, you can monitor your progress on the cockpit gauges or watch the scenery pass by the window. Take the chase view, and the perspective shifts to behind your helicopter squad. But don't sightsee too much; take time to cycle through the multifunction display that shows available weapons, locations of the primary and secondary targets, and a map view of the area.

If you've a lot of ground to cover, select the map view, plot a flight path, and let the autopilot take you there. Maps of enemy positions aren't always reliable, and it's likely you'll meet unexpected resistance, so be careful.

Action Everywhere You Turn

When you do encounter the enemy, alarms sound and the threat display spots blips that represent missiles and enemy ground and air units. You'd better be quick in selecting an appropriate weapon and maneuvering your gunship. Lock on the target-acquisition system and fire away. You can even switch to missile view for a Slim Pickens-style sight, and "ride" the missile all the way to the target.

When you take a hit, damage appears on the cockpit systems board. Yellow and red indicator lights show damage and destruction, so it's easy to scan for your craft's condition. Damage to your chopper's rotors and fuel tanks may be fatal, for instance, but you can fly with a yellow light on the tail rotor, though you'll have to muscle it.

Helicopters are designed for nap-of-the-earth flying, and sneaking behind terrain features keeps you alive a lot longer than trying to outrun surface-to-air missiles.

Because so much of your time is spent so close to the ground, it's important that the topographical graphics images in Gunship 2000 really make you feel as if you're in the landscape, rather than just flying above it.

Lifelong Campaigns

Gunship 2000 mimics reality — you're simply trying to stay alive over an extended campaign. You'll have to accept all kinds of missions, and be responsible for five other pilots and their crews.

Tactical sense plays a part in this simulation, too. Sending your light scout ships, such as the Kiowa Warrior, out in front of your heavy section helps clear the way. Regroup and return to base successfully, and you can recommend members of your squadron for commendations.

After each successful mission, you can watch a replay of the action. Gunship 2000 stores your mission films in archives, so you can study them later and learn from your mistakes. For your most glorious victories, make disk copies and share them with friends.

Easy keyboard interface, attention to detail, and great action graphics make Gunship 2000 the best chopper simulation on the shelves. Though the game demands a fast PC to put on its best show, you can drop to a less-detailed mode if you're playing on a slower computer.

Still, it would be a shame not to enjoy all the fine features of this exciting game. And with additional location disks promised for the future, there's no telling where your next campaign may take you. ❑

MicroProse Software, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (301) 771-1151; IBM AT/XT or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA, MCGA; requires hard disk; joystick recommended; manual copy protection; $69.95

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A-10 TANK KILLER 1.5

By Richard Sheffield

They were unlikely heroes, those hog drivers, mud movers, and ground pounders. Looked down on by the faster-moving and higher-flying jet-fighter jocks, A-10 pilots put up with a lot over the years. Their plane's slow, ugly, and cheap at only $8.7 million a copy. Quite a few thought it ready for the junk pile. But the Persian Gulf War changed all that.

Flying from a remote airfield they called Hog Heaven, A-10 pilots destroyed 1000 tanks and 1200 artillery pieces, a quarter of the enemy's equipment. With the air-to-air war over before it really began, all the F-14 and F-15 pilots could do was sit and watch as the slow movers got the action and the glory.

This new-and-improved version of A-10 Tank Killer from Dynamix lets you strap on America's premier ground-attack aircraft and mix it up, up close and personal. Dynamix did a good job re-creating the combat world of an A-10 pilot. You spend most of your time down on the deck, flying low and slow, where there's little room for error. At a hundred feet, things happen fast — you sneeze, you die.

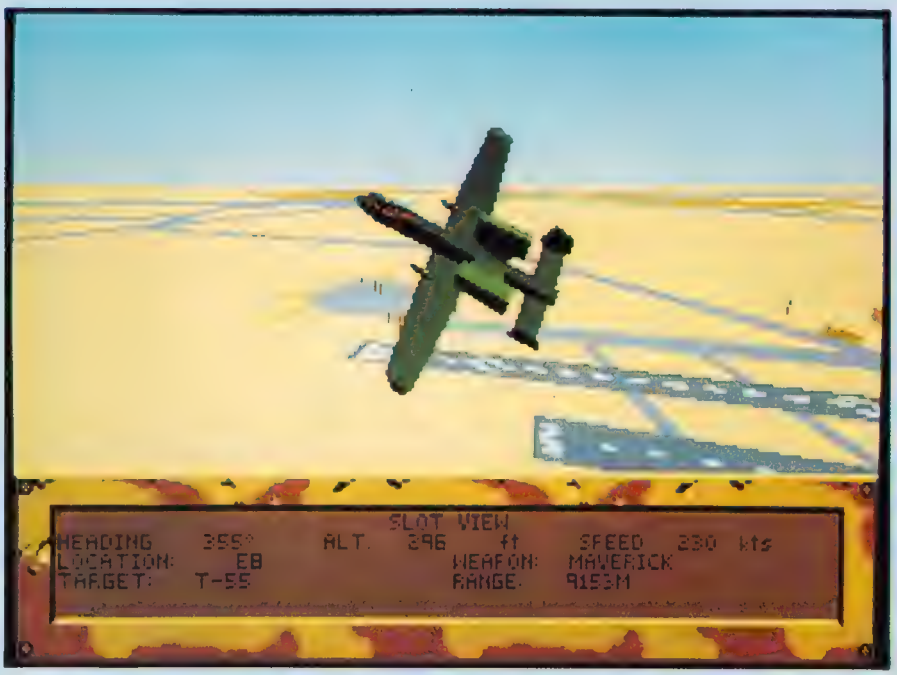
New and Improved

This new version of A-10 Tank Killer is easier to control than its predecessor. The original flight model has been replaced with the one used in Dynamix's best-selling Red Baron, making the new A-10 both smoother in flight and simpler to operate. Also absent is the original version's problem with fast-running computers; the new version adjusts to your computer's speed automatically. But as with Red Baron, A-10's improved flight model needs plenty of horsepower. On a 10-megahertz PC, the screen refresh rate is uncomfortably slow. It's much better on a 16-megahertz machine.

Overall, A-10's graphics are good, but you need VGA to get the most out of the simulation. All of the introductory and interface screens have been redone, and the point-and-click interface has been cleaned up as well. With such an intuitive interface, it doesn't take long to get into the air.

Sound also has been improved greatly. A-10 now supports all major sound boards with real effects and engine noise, not just introductory music as in the earlier version.

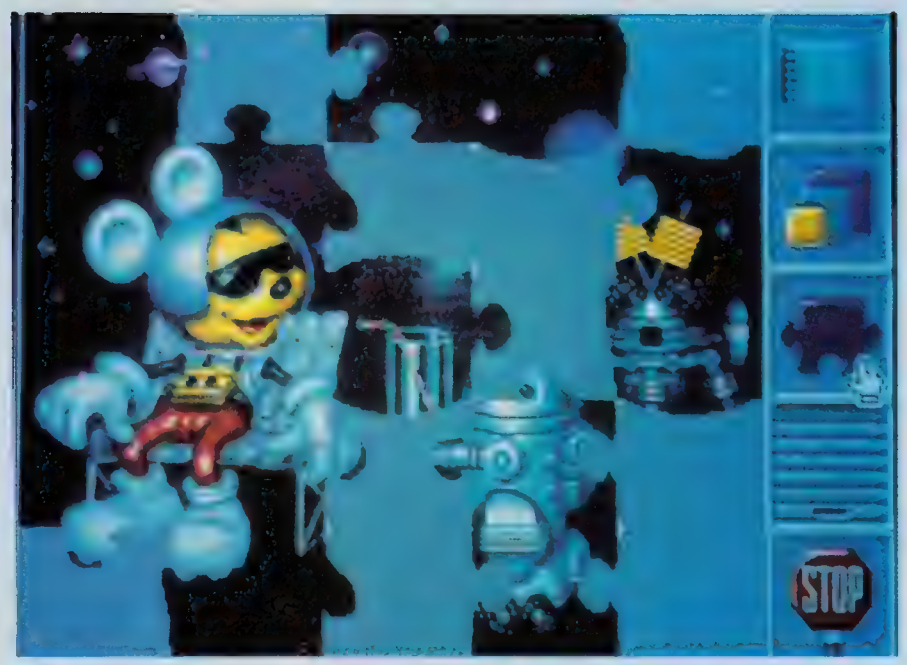
The mission structure is similar to the original's. You're briefed by the commander, and given primary and secondary targets. A-10 Tank Killer version 1.5 includes 21 missions — the original seven, seven more that have been available separately, and seven new Persian Gulf scenarios. It's the last set of seven that make 1.5 worthwhile.



External views give you a different slant on the action in A-10 Tank Killer.

The Persian Gulf missions are good and tough. You'll get to target all the high-tech weapons you saw on CNN, from laser-guided bombs on buildings and bunkers to cluster-bombs on truck convoys. Toss in Maverick missiles against tanks and Scud launchers, Sidewinder missiles for some air-to-air action, and the six-barrel Avenger 30-millimeter cannon, and you've got a handful of dangerous air hardware.

One nice touch is the ability to lure enemy aircraft into friendly surface-to-air missile range. This is a lifesaver ➪



The only things missing from Mickey's Jigsaw Puzzles are the missing pieces.

if you get jumped by MiGs after you've expended your Sidewinders. The lack of help from friendly forces has been a shortcoming of many air-combat simulations for much too long.

Where's the VCR?

A-10 includes a campaign mode, which lets you play through the missions in a back-to-back fashion. But there's no save option during the campaign. Let your pilot get killed and you have to start all over at the first mission. You can slide around this problem by shutting down your system as soon as your pilot dies, before the game has a chance to mark him as dead. This works, but it's aggravating.

Also missing is a mission recorder for instant replays. That's doubly odd; not only do most flight simulators now come equipped with a VCR-like recorder, but the one built into Dynamix's Red Baron is the best in the business.

If you're looking for air-to-ground aircraft action, A-10 is it. There's not much room for fancy flying, just for smooth handling and quick reaction. When you're flying at 50 feet, the ground is unforgiving.

But master this different sort of modern air combat and you can join the ranks of the A-10 pros, like the guys who flew out of Hog Heaven one afternoon and destroyed 23 Iraqi tanks with 24 Maverick missiles. The last one was a dud. This game isn't.

Dynamix/Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible; 10MHz 286 or faster, 640K RAM; CGA, EGA, MCGA, VGA; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Roland MT-32, PS/1 sound boards; hard-disk drive recommended; $59.95, $20 update from 1.0

MICKEY'S JIGSAW PUZZLES

By Gregg Keizer

Kids love puzzles. Maybe that's because the scattered pieces magically form a surprise picture. Or maybe they just like to put things together.

Once finished, though, a puzzle just sits there and looks pretty. It doesn't move, it doesn't talk, and many times, it doesn't even make it out of the box again.

Put a puzzle on the PC and it's a different story. The 15 puzzles in Mickey's Jigsaw Puzzles not only feature Mickey, Minnie, Donald, and Goofy, but they move, shake, animate, and play music once they're complete. Each puzzle is actually eight in one, for you can change the number of pieces with just the click of a mouse. And kids can even color printouts of the puzzle pictures. True, there are no pieces to actually touch — a big part of puzzle play for anyone — but that means you won't ever lose one, either.

Fit It In

Mickey's Jigsaw Puzzles features one of the simplest interfaces in children's software. That makes sense, because it's aimed at kids aged 5 and up.

You can use the keyboard or a joystick to piece together these puzzles, but you and your children will be better off if you put a mouse to work. Point at one of the easily understood icons ranked along the right side of the screen, click, and you're off. A real-world 5-year-old child had no trouble moving the mouse pointer, figuring out which icons did what, and clicking away.

Picking one of the 15 puzzles is easy, too. You can either browse through the scenes or click on any of the numbers at the right. (The program's short instruction booklet shows the puzzles and their corresponding numbers — in color, no less.) From there, you choose the number of pieces in the puzzle — four, nine, 16, 25, 36, 49, or 64 — and decide if you want square or jigsaw-shaped pieces. Square-piece puzzles, harder to assemble, are best for older children or the occasional adult, while the simpler jigsaw-like shapes are more familiar to kids.

Click on the single-piece icon to fill your first hole. If you don't like the piece(s) on screen, you can scroll through those that are left before selecting just the right one. Back at ➪

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the picture, just position the piece over its place, then click to drop. You don't need to be exact; the piece snaps into place, a big boon to tykes playing with the program.

Help is a keypress away. If you get stuck, hit the F1 key to see either the spot for the current piece or the entire picture. Another touch of a key and you're back where you left off.

Other options put a timer on screen for that extra bit of pressure, erase the piece outlines from the empty puzzle, or print a rough sketch of any of the pictures for coloring with crayons, markers, pencils, or paint.

Start the Show

The fun doesn't stop in Mickey's Jigsaw Puzzles when you finish building the picture. Click on the movie-camera icon, or anywhere in the scene, and it springs to life.

Mickey's band, with Donald on sax and Goofy on drums (somehow appropriate), plays a tune, with Donald wiggling, Goofy banging the skins, and Mickey strumming a guitar. The animation won't bowl you over — in fact, it's simplistic and even a bit choppy now and again — but it does spark kids' interest far more than a completed puzzle on the card table.

Sound and music, more PC additives in any good software recipe, also find a home in these 15 puzzles. Without any help, sounds are simply obnoxious buzzes and clicks, and music's missing altogether. Not Disney's fault, of course, but a problem with the PC itself. Add a sound board such as the AdLib, Sound Blaster, or PS/1 Audio Card, and you'll hear much better effects and music, too. (Strangely enough, though the program supposedly supports the AdLib card, there's no selection box for it on the sound-setup screen.)

Naturally, Disney saved the best for its own Sound Source, an inexpensive sound, music, and speech maker that few companies besides Disney Software support. Plug this box into your printer port and the puzzles not only make sound and music, but talk to you as well. Selected puzzles include snips of dialogue, suc as Minnie saying, "Oh, Mickey, that's wonderful!" The speech is clear, and because the words appear in cartoon balloons as they're read, children can follow along.

Mickey's Jigsaw Puzzles won't make many best-of-the-year lists — it's an excellent rendition of puzzle making, true, one with high production values, but it's not breaking any new ground in kids' software. Neither does it push any educational value that you can't get from a puzzle on the floor, whether that's pattern recognition or elementary problem solving. Still, it's an easy add to the family PC library if anyone under 10 likes to pull out a puzzle now and again.

Walt Disney Computer Software, 500 South Buena Vista Street, Burbank, CA 91521, (818) 567-5360; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM (CGA, EGA, Tandy 16-color), 640K RAM (256-color VGA); supports AdLib, IBM PS/1 Audio Card, Sound Blaster, SoundSource boards, Tandy 3-voice sound; $49.95

MIGHT AND MAGIC III

By Bernie Yee

Some dungeons just don't get no respect. That's certainly been true for John Van Canegham's excellent Might and Magic fantasy role-play series, which never received as much credit as was due.

Game play was easily the equal of a Bard's Tale or Wizardry. The second in the series gave the Apple II its best-looking double-hi-res game ever.

Now, New World Computing has pulled out all the VGA and digitized-sound stops with Might and Magic III: Isles of Terra. The game has been much delayed, but it's more than worth it. Might and Magic III is simply the best fantasy role-play game to date, bar none.

Politically Correct FRPG

Old Might and Magic veterans can slip comfortably into the Might and Magic III gaming system, the familiar (and welcome) automapping, and the distinctive magic system based on spell points and gems, the tools necessary to cast more-powerful spells. Might and Magic III presents adventuring in the now-ubiquitous first-person, animated format. Like Eye of the Beholder, combat takes place in manageable real-time. Like Bane of the Cosmic Forge, Might and Magic III works a compelling storyline. But even better than its predecessors, Might and Magic III doesn't limit you to a dungeon setting, no matter how vast. As in the Ultima universe, you can explore richly illustrated forests, towns, oceans, even an entire world.

Might and Magic III offers a typical lineup of character classes and races, and lets you select a portrait from a small but ethnically diverse group of males and females — the first politically correct character generation!

Your party begins in the town of Fountain Head, where there are several small quests to complete. Like every good fantasy role-play game town, Fountain Head has an armory, an inn, a temple, a guild where spells both clerical and magical may be purchased, and most importantly, woes for the brave adventurer to resolve.

Featuring the largest viewing window of any of the popular first-person dungeon-crawl games, Might and Magic III's graphics images are at least the equal of Eye of the Beholder's. Some of the animated sequences are positively stunning.

But the first thing you'll notice is the graphics richness and elegance of the interface. There are eight character slots: six filled with player characters, with the other two reserved for nonplayer character hirelings you'll meet. Each character has a gem that ➪

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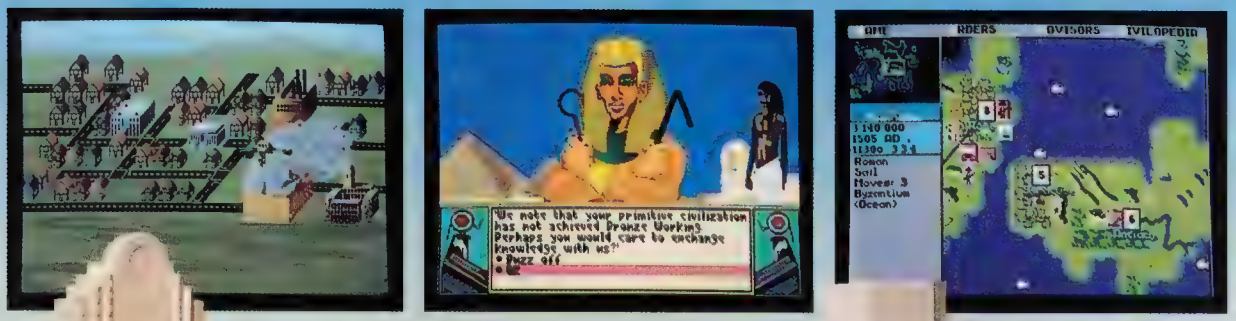
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indicates general health. In this make-believe world, green means completely healthy, yellow means injured, red means a quarter of hit points, blue is unconscious, and a tombstone is self-explanatory. A more-detailed screen appears when you click on the *Quick Information* icon or on the character's portrait to give you complete and accurate stats.

Combat happens in real time. During each character's turn, you can click on an icon to fight, block, use an item, cast a spell, or run. If you cast a spell, a fully animated depiction of the effects follow. A fireball zooms down the screen, igniting your enemies, or a lightning bolt comes complete with sizzling electricity sounds. Arrows fly though the air, and small red splotches signal hits on your enemy (as well as your party). Your enemies are animated bats and lumbering zombies.

Like earlier episodes in the Might and Magic series, special events happen on certain days of the year. Although you can uncover these events by adventuring and listening to tavern gossip, you can't blow your chances of success by missing any one event. Similarly, you can gain huge one-day-only bonuses to any of your attributes by visiting special places.

The game itself is icon-driven and entirely self-contained. The documentation mentions only races, classes, and the most rudimentary spells. You must learn everything else through play. For instance, there's no chart of experience levels. Just click on your experience icon and you'll find out how much experience you'll need to make the next level. When you buy a spell, you're informed of its effects, but only by experimenting can you discover its actual worth.

Other aspects of Might and Magic III are standard for fantasy role-play games: You move under mouse or keyboard control to pick locks, kick in doors, disarm chests, and fight monsters. Your mission is to find the wizard Corak, who will help you block the evil plans of Sheltem — self-styled Guardian of Terra — from destroying the self-same world.

Old hands at Might and Magic will remember that the foundation of Terra, though apparently based on "might & magic," is actually built on incredibly advanced science. This isn't just another kill-the-ultimate-bad-guy plot. You'll be thankful that the fantastic end-game sequence — digitized, animated, and speech-filled — explains all twists.

A close-up of Might and Magic's dungeon window shows a fire-breathing dragon and an axe-wielding giant in VGA simulation.

Measure Up to Magic

By all standards — from graphics and sound to game system and storyline — Might and Magic III is a state-of-the-art, first-person fantasy role-play game. All other games should be compared against this mark of thoughtful and intelligent design.

The next wave of dungeon-crawl games will have to measure up to a sojourn through the Isles of Terra, a task potentially more daunting than vanquishing Sheltem himself.

New World Computing, 20301 Ventura Boulevard, Suite 200, Woodland Hills, CA 91364, (818) 999-0606; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster sound boards, Tandy 3-voice sound; $59.95

MIXED-UP MOTHER GOOSE CD-ROM

By Carol S. Holzberg

This is a *big* fairy tale — a really big fairy tale. Packed on a CD-ROM disc, Mixed-Up Mother Goose sends young children to Mother Goose Land, where they help 18 popular nursery-rhyme characters find the missing pieces to their rhymes. Little Miss Muffet has lost her tuffet, Bo Peep her sheep, Humpty Dumpty his ladder, and Jack Be Nimble his candle.

Mixed-Up Mother Goose is easy to ➪

"SHE STOOD NAKED,

HER WET BODY BATHED IN BEVERLY

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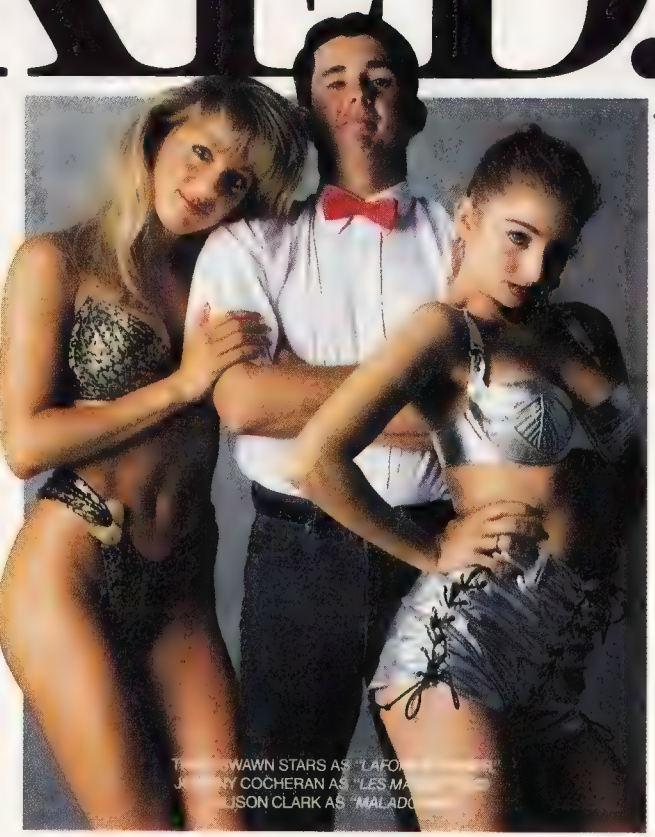

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play, with no confusing keyboard commands to memorize or instructions to read. Children are left on their own to solve the mysteries at their own pace, without any time pressures to beat.

But it's the extras — the sounds, the speech, and the game's graphics — that make this CD-ROM version of a Sierra classic so engaging and entertaining. If only program setup were as slick as the game itself.

If this is a peek at the future of PC games, it's certainly a future well worth grabbing.

At the Banbury Cross crossroads, children decide which road they must take to find the missing pieces of 18 Mixed-Up Mother Goose nursery rhymes.

On the Road Again

A point-and-shoot graphics interface using familiar icons (such as a stop sign to quit the game, or a mouth icon for speech) makes operating this game within the reach of even preschoolers. Youngsters use mouse, joystick, or keyboard cursor arrows to navigate a game piece along paths that crisscross Mother Goose's whimsical kingdom. Along the way they search for missing objects or displaced rhyme personalities. Kids know what to look for because the characters they meet tell them what's lost and show them a picture of what's missing. Other interesting on-screen objects animate and produce amusing sound effects when selected. Mother Goose even greets each child on arrival and explains what must be done.

Kids keep track of their whereabouts with help from an on-screen map. Destinations are marked by a golden egg. Click on a particular golden egg, and the program shows who lives there, helping players learn which missing item goes where.

Each time children reunite a rhyme with its missing object, characters animate and perform the rhyme to music — not the brief snippets of computer music kids may be used to, but full-bodied songs. Because the CD-ROM disc has so much room — hundreds of megabytes — you'll even hear the verse spoken as you watch its words appear on screen.

A picture of the nursery-rhyme character then replaces the map's golden egg, which moves to an on-screen egg carton. Mixed-Up Mother Goose ends when the 18-egg carton is complete. For fun, kids can see and hear a completed rhyme again just by clicking on that rhyme's icon.

Mixed-Up Mother Goose also contains a printed map of the kingdom. Unfortunately, pathways on the paper map don't match those of the on-screen version. To keep kids from getting confused, put away the paper map (or use it as a poster); the electronic map is the one to follow.

You'll find that two Mixed-Up Mother Goose CDs are shipped in the box: The red-labeled disc contains a single English version. It requires headphones or amplified speakers for audio output. This is the version you'll play if your PC sports an AdLib or MT-32 sound board.

The blue-labeled disc lets children listen to German, French, Japanese, or Spanish. This multilingual version needs a sound board equipped with a DAC (digital-to-audio converter) chip — a Sound Blaster, Disney Sound Source, or Tandy DAC.

Youngsters pick a language before playing the game, but once inside the program, there's no way to choose another.

No Simple Simon

Setting up the CD-ROM version of Mixed-Up Mother Goose is no job for Simple Simon. If you forget to plug headphones or speakers into the CD-ROM player's audio jack when you're configuring the red disc for music output through the AdLib or MT-32, you won't hear any sound effects or speech.

The multilingual version is much more difficult to get ready. Directions in the *Parent Guide* don't match those in the *ReadMe* file on the disc, while the *ReadMe* file conflicts with the specs listed on the box.

The program's installation utility in the multilingual version lets you select the AdLib for music output and Disney's Sound Source for audio playback. When you set it up that way, though, you get music, but no speech or sound.

To get the CD to pump music through the AdLib (or MT-32) and speech or sound effects through the Sound Source, you have to call Sierra and have technical support walk you through several steps as you modify your PC's CONFIG.SYS file.

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All in all, it's surely no fairy-tale installation procedure for Mixed-Up Mother Goose.

The Journey Is the Reward

Once you solve the sound problems, Mixed-Up Mother Goose becomes a wonderful early-childhood game that both introduces kids to computers and hands them some old familiar friends in a fancy new wrapper.

Colorfully animated graphics images encourage exploration, stimulate thinking, and motivate kids to solve puzzles. And because the missing pieces change position with each new game, children can play again and again without getting bored.

If you can overcome the never-never land of hardware setup, a visit to the kingdom of Mixed-Up Mother Goose is an electric trip well worth taking.

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (209) 683-4468; IBM PC or compatible; 286 or faster; VGA, MCGA; requires CD-ROM drive; supports AdLib, Disney Sound Source, Roland MT-32, LAPC-I, CM-32L, Sound Blaster, Tandy DAC sound boards; mouse or joystick optional; $59.95

TRUMP CASTLE II

By Carol S. Holzberg

Robin Leach and his friends among the rich and famous never had it so good. You don't even need to leave home to hob-nob when you gamble for high stakes in Trump Castle II. This entertaining computer simulation (modeled after the real action at Trump Castle Casino Resort by the Bay in Atlantic City) offers six popular games. With a bit of luck, you may be the one to break the bank at baccarat, blackjack, craps, roulette, slots, or video poker.

Spend some time with Trump Castle II before you step up to a real-life blackjack table — the game's mind-boggling in its complexity.

Step right up, ladies and gentlemen. Place your bets. Game play follows the rules of the New Jersey Casino Commission (except for video poker). Play alone or with up to four friends. Gamble to win, or sharpen your betting skills with multiple-hand strategies. You can do it all without laying a dime on the green felt.

Almost Real

Digitized photos of Atlantic City's Trump Castle casino, colorful graphics images, and animated sequences make this game come alive on the PC screen. You can make a beeline for the gambling stations off the main lobby, or take a few moments to explore the casino. Click on one of the screen's hot spots and you'll head for several interesting locations.

Click on the lobby water fountain and watch the water begin to flow. Sally down the east hallway and drop in at the casino's restaurant, bar, health club, or swimming pool. Visit the west hallway and spend some time on a tour of the casino's luxurious room accommodations.

You can check out what's on tap in the entertainment lounge or flip through the pages of the hotel's newspaper to see a list of top-ten jackpot winners. To exit the game, make your way to the lobby escalator. Moving stairs transport you to the Trump Castle Bus, ready for the trip back to DOS and reality. At every location, you can meet other casino visitors, even eavesdrop on their conversations.

When you're ready for some action, click on the appropriate hot spot to select a game. The interface is easy to use, but the program could benefit from a quick-reference card showing the screen's hot spots and their corresponding games.

You start off the night with a bankroll of $1000. If your luck runs out and funds dry up, a quick visit to the friendly cashier brings you another grand. If only real life were this simple!

A handy gaming guide provides play instructions. You'll find information on casino rules, odds of winning, and payouts for the bets you place. And on-line help is always available.

Just like real casino action, some Trump Castle II games set a table minimum (the lowest amount you can wager). At least you get to decide if you're a big spender, for you pick the minimum. At baccarat, for example, choices include $20, $100, and $500 limits; blackjack and craps tables run from $5 to $500. Video poker's for ➪

Elvira II
The Jaws of Cerberus

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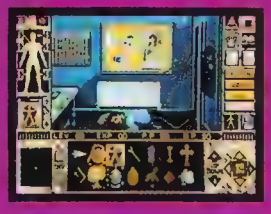

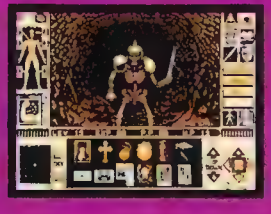

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the cheapskates in the crowd — you can bet as little as a $1 a game.

The slot machine is the most fun at Trump Castle, and requires almost no learning time, even for gambling rookies. The real Trump Castle in Atlantic City has a slew of slot machines that can run you as much as $100 a pull, but this make-believe casino takes only $1 tokens. You can bail out easily before you lose your socks.

After you place from one to three coins in the appropriate slot, the handle on the unit cranks automatically. Icons flash furiously in front of your eyes to represent the spinning dials. It's too bad you can't win with lemons — they show up all too often.

It's almost as easy to get hooked on baccarat, a card game in which you can lose a bundle faster than the Soviet Union loses republics. A winning hand must come as close as possible to, or equal, nine. Baccarat is simple to play, but difficult to win.

Come On In

All Trump Castle II games are entertaining. The program's consistent graphics interface makes it easy to select chips for wagers, place bets, visit the cashier for extra funds, or navigate to the main lobby to choose another game.

Trump Castle II's only Achilles heel is its pitiful range of sound effects. You hear coins rumble as they insert into slots and cards shuffle, but most noises verge on unimaginative clicks, rattles, and squawks. Music's little better, even with an AdLib card.

Despite the program's meager sound effects, Trump Castle II brings some of the visceral excitement of authentic casino action to the computer screen. Sophisticated game options, coupled with a friendly user interface, make this program as entertaining as it is down to earth.

Before taking a trip to Atlantic City (believe it or not, the game comes with a $20 discount coupon to the real Trump Castle Casino Resort), play Trump Castle II and sharpen your gambling skills. Whether you're a serious high roller or a fun-loving thrill seeker, it's a safe bet you won't lose any real money gambling the night away in front of the computer.

Capstone/Intracorp, 14202 Southwest 136th Street, Miami, FL 33186, (800) 468-7226; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM (CGA, EGA, Tandy), 640K RAM (VGA, MCGA); DOS 2.1 or later; CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; mouse or joystick optional; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster sound boards; off-disk copy protection; $49.95

Objects interspersed among Pick'n Pile's balls aid and hinder your quest. (Note the blue multiplier boxes to the far left.)

PICK'N PILE

By Wayne Kawamoto

"Out, damned spot!" cries the sleepwalking Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's play. Of course, the Bard was writing about guilt and ambition, not computer games. But if you get started with UbiSoft's addictive Pick'n Pile, you'll soon be echoing the lunatic lady's cry.

Pick'n Pile is similar in style to Tetris, the shape-placing Russian arcade game. With first-rate action, nice graphics, and a can't-put-it-down attitude, Pick'n Pile follows in Tetris' steps, but certainly doesn't break any new ground. If you're looking for a sense of *déjà vu*, you won't be disappointed. But if you didn't like Tetris, you won't like Pick'n Pile.

Cascading Balls, Exploding Screens

Pick'n Pile immerses your screen in a sea of colorful cascading balls. Your job is to eliminate them before the screen explodes, all the while beating a relentless clock ticking down precious seconds. If you somehow finish, before you know it it's off to the next ruthless level.

You make the balls disappear by stacking like-colored balls in columns. Move an arrow with your mouse, keyboard, or joystick, then click on two balls to make them exchange positions. Other objects intermixed with the balls aid or hinder your quest. Hourglasses slow down the clock, little devils speed it up. Walls control the balls' movements, flames and flower pots destroy objects, and bombs clear wide areas. Collect diamonds along the way to increase your score.

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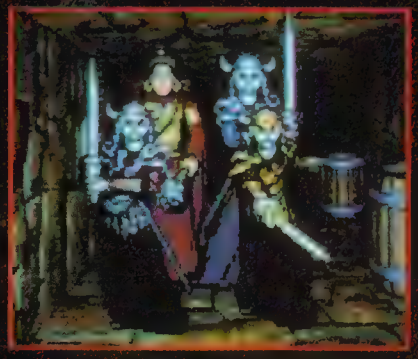

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As you get better, you'll use the multiplying blocks to send your score soaring. When placed in a column, these blocks multiply the points you score when you eliminate the column.

In some ways, Pick'n Pile harks back to the childhood game of hot potato. As time clicks down, the clock ticks faster and faster. (It also seems to get louder and louder.) You try frantically to get rid of the hot potatoes — the final remaining balls — before the screen explodes.

As if Pick'n Pile weren't tough enough, its playing field changes constantly. Each time you remove a set of balls, the resulting space fills in with others. Start on a general strategy, remove a few columns, and the balls shift. Suddenly, it's a whole new ball game.

Pick'n Pile is easy to learn. The brief six-page manual tells you everything you need to know to quickly install and play the game: It takes only minutes to tear off the shrink wrap, install all 400K of the program, and begin playing.

The game supports joysticks and mice, as well as the keyboard. The mouse is the most responsive, and the keypad is virtually unplayable.

You can hear the musical soundtrack during the introductory screens if you have an AdLib board. The interlude music between levels, however, leaves a lot to be desired — it was fuzzy and unintelligible. Pick'n Pile's EGA/VGA graphics images are well done, but the CGA is just passable. Play at the higher EGA/VGA resolution if possible, if only because the pieces are easer to distinguish.

One More Time

The action is addictive and exhilarating. Like any good arcade game, Pick'n Pile has that intangible knack of getting you to try just one more game. Of course, these "one mores" inevitably expand into dozens. And because Pick'n Pile plays so quickly, it's a perfect choice for those short and energizing breaks from work that we all need from time to time.

One caution: Don't play Pick'n Pile if you're trying to reduce your stress level. The ticking clock, the frenzied tasks at hand, and the exploding screen are the types of things that make the heart palpitate.

Not Too Deep

If you like pure arcade, hand/eye coordination action, this game is worth a look. But like every other Tetris face/well/column incarnation, Pick'n Pile has the same general feel. Don't expect much that's new.

If you crave meaning in your computer gaming, and if you didn't like Tetris or you saw no point in playing it, you won't like this one either. Just say *nyet*.

If you do take up Pick'n Pile, here's fair warning: It's hard to stop playing. Go ahead and have fun, but don't forget that there's life outside the computer screen.

UbiSoft, 511 Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, Suite C, Greenbrae, CA 94904, (415) 332-8749; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM; DOS 3.2 or later; CGA, EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib sound board; mouse recommended; $39.95

LOGITECH MOUSEMAN CORDLESS RADIO MOUSE

By Barry Brenesal

The problem with mice is that their tails get in the way. When you're playing a fast-action arcade game, you don't want some cord pulling your screen cursor up short, or tangling itself around your keyboard.

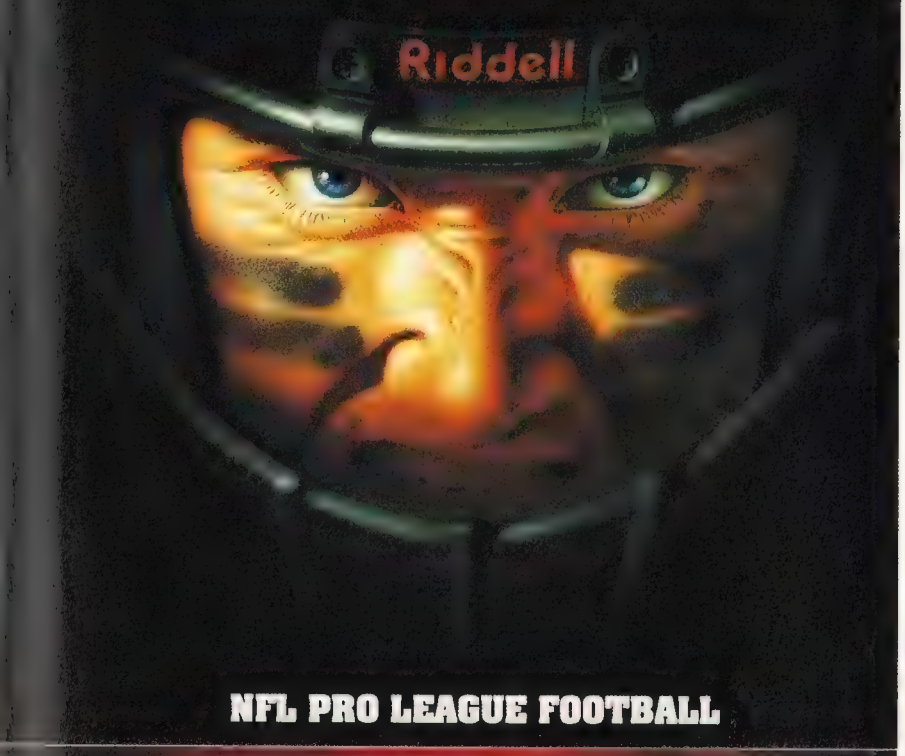
Enter Logitech's Mouseman Cordless Radio Mouse, a desktop rodent that leaves you free to concentrate on the really important things in life — like shooting down that Kilrathi spaceship creeping up on your right.

Ballistic Mouse

Radio Mouse comes with a small receiver box that attaches to your serial port (a mouse-port adapter is

There's no tail to get in the way of this mouse. Customize the buttons — but you'd better not be a southpaw.

NO GUTS!



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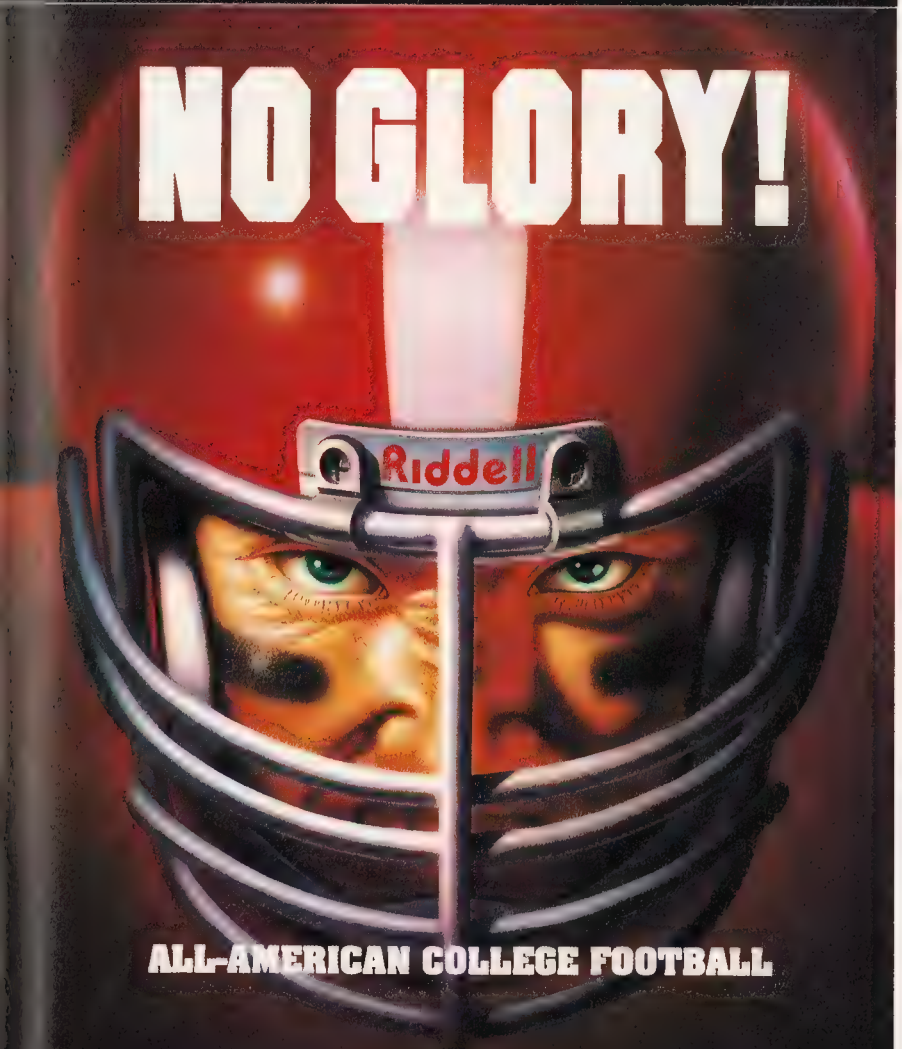

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All-American College Football is available for IBM or Compatible Computers with EGA or VGA Graphics. Printer is optional.

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also included). It installs easily and requires only a few minor adjustments. A single lithium battery powers the signal that communicates between mouse and receiver.

Other than its cordless design, Radio Mouse's real strength is its easy customization. Several memory-resident menu utilities fine-tune Radio Mouse's response. One of these, *Click*, lets you define mouse sensitivity, the number of buttons and their orientation, and ballistics effect. This last choice determines the distance a mouse covers with a broader, faster hand movement. Even if your mouse is set to move only a short distance in standard use, you can make it respond dramatically to sharp, sweeping gestures with a high ballistics setting.

Click also accesses *LogiMenus* directly. These menus help you define mouse response for individual programs—a boon to gamers, because you may not want the mouse to act the same way in Might and Magic III as in Heart of China, or even Microsoft Windows. Radio Mouse's LogiMenus come preconfigured for 29 productivity applications, including WordPerfect, AutoCAD, and XTreePro. Adding new selections is a breeze, because you define parameters through either mouse or keyboard input. When you run a program later, *Click* looks for a *LogiMenu* entry automatically, and loads the default controls you've created.

GoMenu, another Logitech TSR, runs keyboard-based applications. You access it to customize different button combinations — such as defining the left and middle buttons pressed together as *F* for *Fire*. While this works well enough, it's a poor substitute for keyboard input on games that have a slew of keyboard-command choices. After all, the Radio Mouse's three buttons only offer a maximum of nine combinations; remembering what the combinations mean is even more unlikely.

Managing Memory

All this memory-resident programming does have its drawbacks. Running Radio Mouse eats up about 60K of your precious RAM, enough to slow down programs or even bring some memory-intensive games to a screeching halt. This happened several times during testing. Those same games, when played using other, nonprogrammable mice that required only an installed driver, worked without problems.

Another potential trouble spot inherent in Radio Mouse's design is loss of signal. After sitting inactive for a day, Radio Mouse got out of sync with its receiver periodically. The solution — no small feat — was to remove the lithium battery from within the mouse. A few seconds later the transmitter resets, you can reload the battery, and the two devices are talking to one another again. During the test period, the problem cropped up roughly every three days.

If you're a left-handed mouser, you may want to steer clear of the Radio Mouse — it's made for right-handed users, unlike the standard Logitech Mouseman. The three buttons follow a circular right-handed pattern, adding a thumb rest to the left. Using the Radio Mouse with the left hand is both awkward and uncomfortable, although it handles quite smoothly and unobtrusively in the right hand.

A qualified endorsement, then, for the Logitech Mouseman Radio Mouse. It's a good idea that works well — when it works — but it's hampered by hefty memory requirements, a right-handed-only orientation, and a signal that drifts away from its frequency.

If you're pressed for space, you might be better served to consider a trackball instead.

Logitech, Inc., 6505 Kaiser Drive, Fremont, CA 94555, (800) 231-7717; $159

WORDTRIS

By Lafe Low

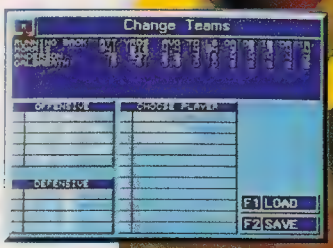
Get ready to fumble with falling pieces and curse the laws of gravity again. Wordtris, the next in the venerable series of addictive arcade puzzle games, puts letters on screen instead of blocks. Think of it as "Tetris Meets Scrabble," and you've got it pinned down.

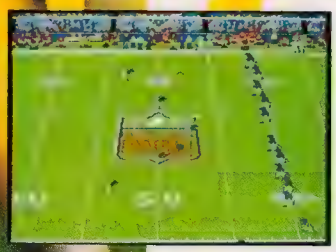
The idea is simple — form words from the cascading letters — but Wordtris puts your spelling and vocabulary skills under intense pressure.

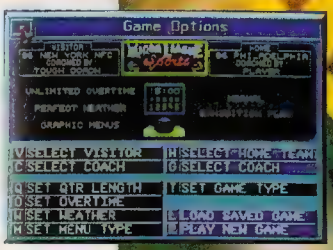
Now that you've saved the planet and rescued the Princess 41 times...

you're ready for a real challenge!

IBM EGA







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Tetris captured our attention and destroyed our productivity with falling cubes. Welltris added a third dimension to the puzzle. Faces, third in line, may have been an interesting permutation on the theme, but frankly would have been only a novelty game without its impressive family lineage.

Now it's Wordtris, a game with the same captivating play that made Tetris famous. Wordtris features letters as falling puzzle pieces; the object is to create words, not to fill up space. Much of the original challenge of Tetris is here, but with an extra twist to torque your brain.

Well of Water

But Wordtris' letters don't act quite like Tetris' blocks. Instead of sinking all the way to the bottom, where they'd quickly become blocked and useless, they float at the center of the screen as if dropped into a well half full of water. Pile one letter on another and it pushes the first one down a space. When the letters reach the bottom, they start stacking up.

You try to form words from these tumbling letters. Move the pieces right or left, then drop them down. The program allows both horizontal and vertical word formations. When you manage to create a word with your collage of letters, it disappears from the pile like the rows of blocks in Tetris and you score points — more for longer words, fewer for shorter ones. Special golden tiles double and triple a word's points. There are even mystery tiles you can change into any letter by pressing the appropriate key — if you're fast enough.

As with Wordtris' ancestors, you can play in several different game modes — single player, cooperative (where two players work toward one score), competitive, tournament, and head to head (via modem or a direct-cable connection).

If you're up to Wordtris' challenge, play with unlimited time and you're ready to build as many words and score as many points as possible. Or you can play against the clock, with two, five, ten, or 15-minute limits.

Wordtris has plenty of other options to keep you coming back. One with a direct effect on difficulty is the repeat-words switch. When turned on, you'll score points for a word only the first time you make it. If you build *Zimbabwe* (the word, not the country), for instance, you'll score a ton of points. Create it a second time, though, and you earn nothing.

You can also opt to display the next letter, a familiar concept to Tetris players, who can preview the next shape before it appeared. Wordtris is a bit easier when you can see a letter into the future.

Wordtris requires strategy and planning just as much as the best-selling Tetris. You can take a risk, and hope that just the right letter appears. Or you can go for the gusto and simply build short words with what the game gives you.

No matter how you play, you can be proud to simply survive Wordtris' alphabet mayhem. You'll have done some quick thinking and worked some fast fingers — but you'll also have enjoyed a healthy dose of luck.

A Great Kid

Wordtris is a fantastic addition to the Tetris family tree. It even remains faithful to the mother country, with images and graphics depicting the Soviet people. (I wonder if the word *communism* is in the game's dictionary.)

They laughed at me when I extolled the educational virtues of Tetris. With its need for quick, logical thinking and spatial visualizations, you could definitely stir up some gray matter with a few rounds of the game. Wordtris has all that, and more.

In fact, it's impossible to ignore the educational value of Wordtris. Not only are the spatial and thinking skills still required, but the game also demands fast spelling and a deep vocabulary.

More important for fun on the PC, though, is that it still bears one striking resemblance to its daddy, Tetris — Wordtris is a blast to play.

Spectrum HoloByte, 2061 Challenger Drive, Alameda, CA 94501, (415) 522-3584; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; CGA, EGA, VGA; mouse or joystick optional; modem play optional with 1200- or 2400-bps Hayes-compatible modem; off-disk copy protection; $39.95

CYBERNETIC RANGER

By Peter Olafson

Face it. Large-sprite arcade games just don't play on the IBM. The machine simply wasn't built for them. Lacking the specialized chips that make those games fly on 16-bit videogame consoles, PCs tend to be rather balky and awkward arcade players.

Once in a while, though, software overcomes those hardware flaws. Cybernetic Ranger — the first game from Texas developer Symtus — stuffs video-arcade speed and smoothness inside your PC. Unfortunately, that's about all it sticks inside your computer. For all its looks, and those are sometimes stunning, Cybernetic Ranger simply shows better than it plays.

Bionic Man About Town

Cybernetic Ranger suffers from a well-worn arcade-action plot: As Micah Mason, bionic man, you're set to searching the galaxy for pods that protect a scientific discovery. The quest takes you through a research ship, through space, and across a string of planets. You'll gather information and weapons, and face off against some nasty customers.

There's a good deal to admire in Cybernetic Ranger, and some fun to be had when you're done admiring. The game snaps in 256-color VGA, and compares well with what you'd ➪

The Games: Winter Challenge

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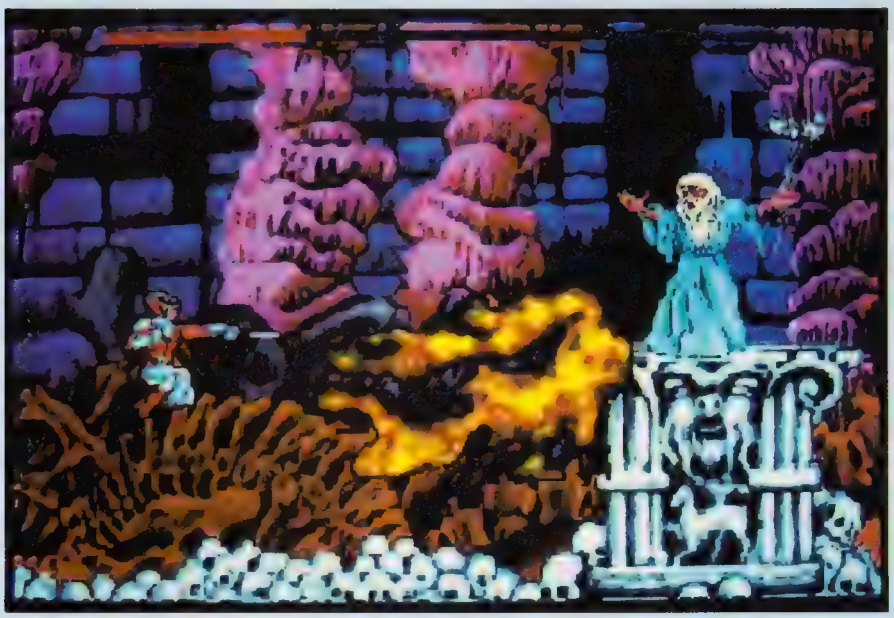
expect to see on something like the Sega Genesis video-game system. And the combination of AdLib and Real-Sound can produce a delightfully realistic racket.

There's also some nice variety to the challenges, what with horizontal-scrolling, platform, and in-space levels, and the two platform levels are recast at random each time you play. As mentioned, speed and smoothness aren't issues; the game doesn't strain a 286. Moreover, finely wrought touches are everywhere: the dithered gray-screen borders, the layered metal door that opens to receive Micah at the end of the first level, the tiny map that turns up on the second level, or the spinning blue polygon globe that heralds the introduction of each new planet. All these give the sense of a game designed with panache and style, and anticipate greatness to come.



Micah poses with a caveman and icecat on chilly Chriptillia during a scene in Cybernetic Ranger.

The Promise Not Kept

Yet that anticipated greatness never arrives. Portions of Ranger seem curiously haphazard and ill-considered. Take the "talk" function, for instance. It's great to converse with characters rather than just turn them into toast — more games should have this option — but you have no choice in conversational gambits, and there's only one spot where this ability has any effect on the game's outcome. Otherwise, the responses are more like cheerleading, or like Batman and the Joker trading insults between comic-book punches.

Then there's the matter of the first level. Micah teleports onto the research ship — oddly, he always arrives about six feet in the air — with the task of blasting his way through the floating corpses of the crew members. If it sounds gruesome in the description, you should see it on screen. Maybe this should have been a ducking-and-jumping level instead of a shooting one. So much for open-coffin funerals, I suppose.

And much of the second level doesn't even have a floor. When Micah hits the bottom of this platform-based segment, he simply walks through the air for the most part. Platforms also have a disconcerting habit of appearing and disappearing. It's deliberate, but you're never told. The intermediate flying-through-space levels — heralded on the back of the manual as "the ultimate in simulated space piloting" — take you to the destination planet no matter what twisted course you follow. Even when bombarded relentlessly with meteors, the threat to Micah's survival seems small. The view screen is pretty, but like much in Cybergenic Ranger, this prettiness is useless when it comes to game play.

Finally, joystick response when firing from a crouch (as sometimes proves helpful) seems painfully inconsistent. Don't get me wrong. For an IBM arcade game, Cybergenic Ranger isn't bad, and in terms of invention and subtle beauty, it's better than many. It simply hasn't been fine-tuned enough to make it more than a game with a pretty face.

Symtus, P.O. Box 912, Palacios, TX 77465, (800) 255-2374; IBM PC or compatible; 10MHz or faster; 640K RAM; EGA, VGA, MCGA; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards; joystick optional; requires hard-disk drive; $49.95

MEGATRAVELLER 2: THE QUEST FOR THE ANCIENTS

By Peter Olafson

This game's a rare breed. It's a role-play game. That's an odd thing to say, isn't it? There are all kinds of solid role-play games out there for the PC, including this title's predecessor, MegaTraveller 1: The Zhodani Conspiracy. Aren't there?

But many of those games provide precious little in the way of realistic role play. Sometimes their play seems more like running a database, taking a census, or following an overgrown path.

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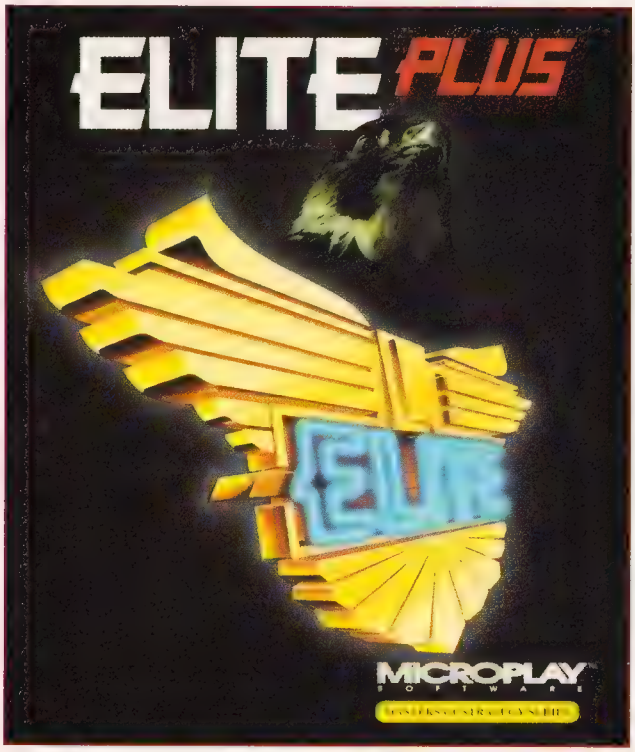
Play *Elite Plus* and earn the title!

IBM screens shown. Actual screens may vary.



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- More missions, more opportunities, more challenges.

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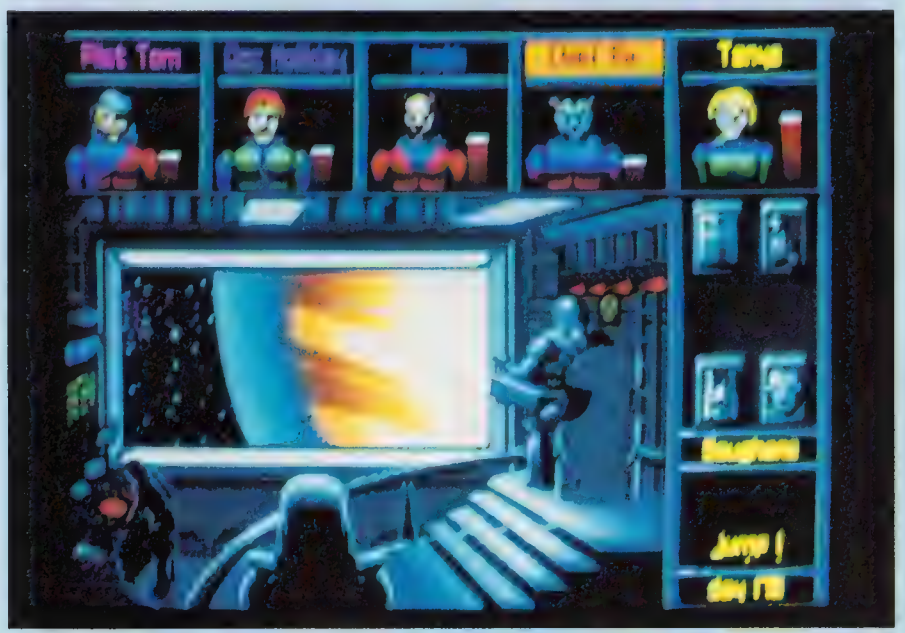
When you first hit town in the typical role-play game, what do you do? You probably go into every building and talk to every soul around. If a door's locked, you try to pick it. If you can't pick it, you break it down. If a character won't talk to you, you bribe him.



Take your protein pills and put your helmet on: You're aboard your ship, and it's time for the jump in MegaTraveller 2.

And all the while, you boss each character in your party as though he or she were an extension of your personality, rather than an individual with his or her own skills and weaknesses. *Hold this. Carry this. Shoot him. Walk this way.* Orders, orders, orders.

Be a Pal

That's why it's so nice to find a game like MegaTraveller 2, where you don't have such free rein. Common sense prevails. Most buildings — done up in the industrial-strength vacuum-cleaner style of architecture — are off-limits to you, and properly so, you little housebreaker. Characters who have something to say are green, enemies are red, and most of the folks thronging in the streets are gray, and go on about their business without as much as a a howdy-do. (Sure this isn't New York?)

Moreover, the cities themselves are much more like genuine cities, rather than the abstractions used in the first episode. With the new zoom function — the best way to spot significant structures or people — you can get down to street level, where the game's vastness just swallows you up.

Combat isn't excessive, and a basic but flexible set of commands makes MegaTraveller 2 easier to manage than its earlier version. And MegaTraveller 2 is certainly more glamorous: Graphics images are glossier and there's a whole animated introduction.

But it's hardly a case of glitz at the expense of content. Paragon has kept intact the charming, in-depth character creation routine — even expanding it a bit to permit character generation for the pencil-and-paper game — and the manual, while not the little *Britannica* of the first game, is thorough and fun.

But the best part of MegaTraveller 2 is its *PAL* system. Let's suppose you want a ride to another planet, and have to negotiate the fare with the pilot. In the typical role-play game, you'd check the manual and see what skills come into play, then go through the character roster to see if your team matches up with those skills. Work at best, a nuisance at worst.

Not in MegaTraveller 2. Using PAL, your characters respond to situations as befits their talents. Once aboard your ship, for instance, each assumes the position for which he's best suited. My leader spoke right up and volunteered for the negotiating job. (He was a diplomatic second secretary while in the service.). You can override PAL if you want, but why bother? This is a delightful step forward in role-play games. It spares you the numbing numberwork — but, more important, makes you feel as though you're dealing with intact, sensible personalities, not simply a set of mindless drones who do your bidding heedless of the consequences.

Beyond that, the whole thing is splendidly open-ended. While note taking and orderliness are good ideas, you can approach MegaTraveller 2 from any number of directions, or take any number of side excursions. MegaTraveller 2 isn't just more like role play than the typical computer role-play game. It's more fun.

The World They Live In

What about the story? It's fairly standard role-play fare: setting your gang of five in search of a way to stop an Ancient site on Rhylanor from belching toxic violet slime — slime that will cover Rhylanor Startown in seven years. Naturally, there's a reward for stopping it.

The Ancients were an advanced race who met an apocalyptic end, but left mysterious little artifacts about the Spinward Marches — and you'll quickly find it's your duty, one of your many duties, in fact, to collect these and turn them in. There are around 100 planets in the game, so get started.

One reason for talking to everybody is to keep interest up. A city that's too realistic — full of locked buildings and mute occupants — isn't going to be as much fun as a loose-lipped town full of forgetful folks. A certain amount of seen-it-before boredom sets in after you've visited the third rectangular city of industrial-strength vacuum cleaners — a problem that might have been avoided with the addition of a couple of extra city-background sets.

Continued on Page 84

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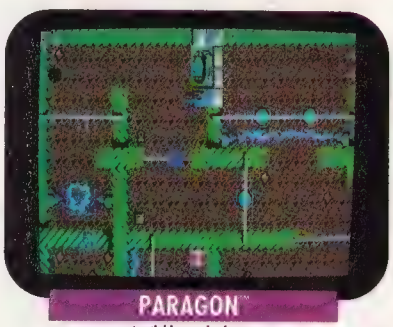

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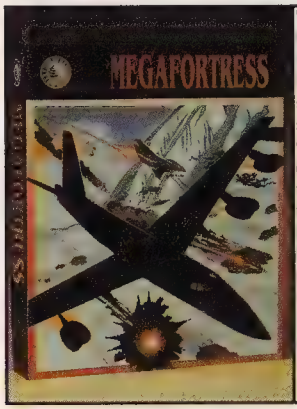

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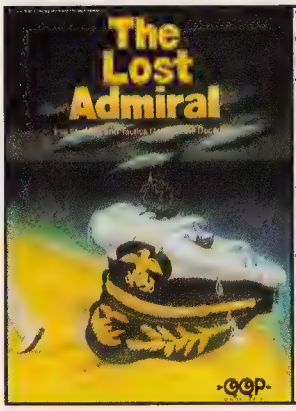

'LOST ADMIRAL' from **QUANTUM QUALITY PRODUCTIONS** is a turn based production naval strategy game. Features 9 scenarios, a random map scenario, 15 campaign games, flagships with special abilities, very strong artificial intelligence, in depth officers ranking system, accumulates your career history as you play, 2 player option, and sound board support. In short better than **EMPIRE.** **$34**

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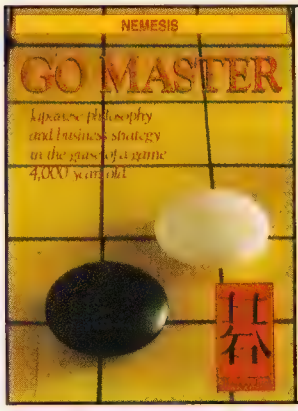

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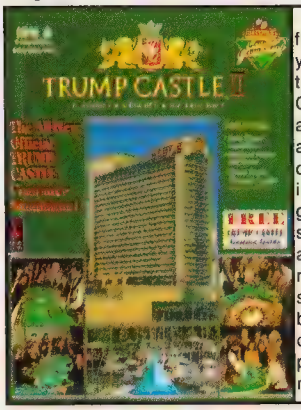

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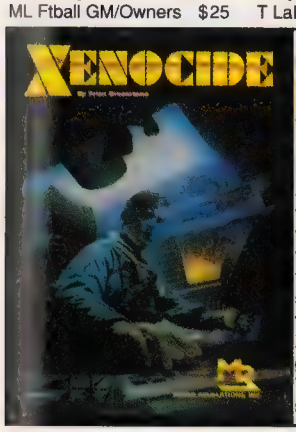

'XENOCIDE' from **MICRO REVELATIONS** is a fast paced arcade puzzle strategy game. This is an all in one arcade game with first person 3D view simulator, profile side view, and top down view. Three moons with four levels each require fast reflexes and sound strategy/puzzle solving to obliterate the Xenomorphs. Good graphics in 256 color VGA with sound board support. **$29**

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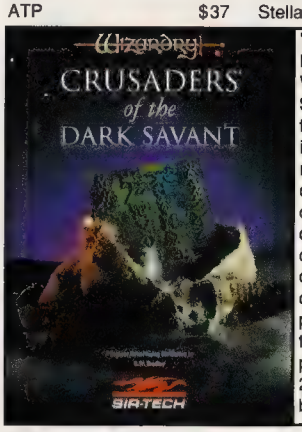

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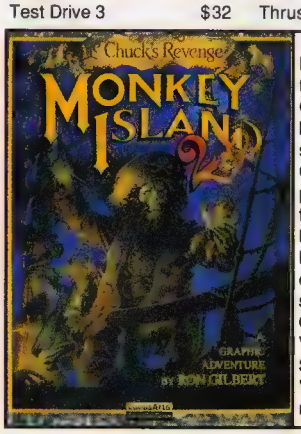

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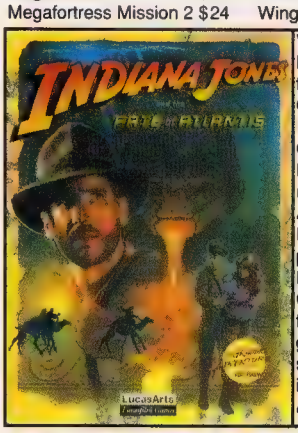

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Continued from Page 80

But that's basically cosmetic, and over the long haul of MegaTraveller 2, it doesn't matter much. The game has the depth of a mineshaft. Even if you're not on a mission, there's always something to do. My party, just starting out in Rhylanor Startown, wandered the streets, sought out characters, took a little money out of the bank to go shopping for gear, and finally stumbled onto a library terminal.

Bliss. I know the MegaTraveller universe only from computers. My party had some time to kill, and started reading files. Before I knew it, it was way past time for bed.

Paragon Software/Microprose,180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (301) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Sound Master, Roland sound boards; joystick and mouse optional; $59.95

READER RABBIT 2

By Cynthia E. Field

Mix imagination and education and you've got the same recipe for software success that The Learning Company cooked up years ago. Reader Rabbit 2, the company's latest offering for kids aged 5 to 8, brings back the rabbit that winks, jumps for joy, and generally encourages kids as they master reading skills. Reader Rabbit 2 blends fun and learning in a setting that grabs kids' attention and keeps them moving.

Wordville, U.S.A.

Reader Rabbit 2 takes kids to Wordville, where they hop aboard the *Discovery Train* and choose a game destination — *Word Mine*, *Vowel Pond*, *Match Patch*, or the *Alphabet Dance*.

Word skills grow in Reader Rabbit's Match Patch as you match carrots.

When you complete a compound word that names the object shown in one of *Word Mine*'s colorful illustrations, Holey Mole drops a word crystal into your rail car. Make three correct words and you get a crystal token. Win ten tokens and you're handed a super crystal. Three of these and you advance to higher challenge levels automatically, where you complete words that begin — or end — with two-letter blends (like *sh* or *bl*). On level 4 you finish words by typing any legitimate endings you can think of. Reader Rabbit 2 recognizes some 1000 words.

Vowel Pond lets children practice recognizing short and long vowels. At beginner levels, Punky the Skunk holds a "sounds like" sign that displays a word with the target vowel sound. When a fish labeled *hit* swims by during a short-*i* game, for instance, press the enter key or click on the fish with the mouse and Reader Rabbit scoops the finned fellow into a pail of water.

Match Patch — with its gigantic carrots — must have been a Miracle-Gro test garden. In this game, you click on a carrot and read its word label. Choose other carrots to try to find a match — just like in the old TV game show *Concentration*. In Wordville's garden, correct matches are rhymes, antonyms, or words that sound alike.

For recreation, the village animals gather at Goldie Hen's barn for the *Alphabet Dance*. The easiest level has you line up four dancers — *Quana*, *Rob*, *Stacy*, and *Tasha*, for example — in alphabetical order. At higher levels, you sort dancers with names that begin with letters far apart in the alphabet (*Alice*, *Fanny*, *Laura*, *Yate*) or with an identical first letter but sorted by a second letter (*Seth*, *Sonny*, *Steve*, and *Susan*).

You could dismiss Reader Rabbit 2 as just another drill-and-practice program if it weren't for its charming, full-color, animated graphics and delightful sound effects. Clever graphics touches abound. Each game's cursor matches the scene. Play *Word Mine* and the cursor becomes a miner's pick, while in *Match Patch* it changes to a gardening trowel.

Other encouragements show more life. When you win *Word Mine* crystals, Reader Rabbit somersaults. In Match Patch, the rabbit and the accompanying Go-Go Gophers applaud your carrot-pairing *savoir-faire*. Even inappropriate answers bring smiles to kids' faces: Catch a wrong fish in *Vowel Pond* and Reader Rabbit grimaces as if to say, "Uh-oh!"

Reader Rabbit 2's music helps make the program an entertainer, too. The lilting welcome melody, the choo-chooing train ride song, and the

variety of barn-dance tunes keep even the most out-of-touch parent amused. Without question, a sound board enhances your listening pleasure.

At certain interludes the program lets more adept players speed up the action. In *Vowel Pond*, for instance, you can press the spacebar to make the wrong fish swim away faster. This feature, as well as its automatic and user-selected challenge levels, helps Reader Rabbit 2 fit children of varying abilities. Because the program can track and save progress for as many as eight kids, Rabbit 2 is also a good candidate for the classroom computer corner.

We Want Speech

Reader Rabbit 2 needs speech — an important part of the learning-to-read process. A talking version of Reader Rabbit would be grand. For now, though, you'll have to settle for a silent bunny. (Keep your ears open for some striking speech in an upcoming release from Reader Rabbit's creators, though.)

Here's something else the game's programmers could incorporate. Parents and teachers should be able to print game scores, or a certificate of some kind. Kids love things that shows off their accomplishments. You can't in Reader Rabbit 2.

Wish lists aside, Reader Rabbit 2 suffers from one oversight: On level 4 of the *Word Mine* module, you can type the same word three times to collect a crystal. An educational package shouldn't let you cheat like that, but this goof doesn't seriously detract from an otherwise top-notch program.

As some business-software giants rush to install pay-by-the-minute 900 support numbers, it's refreshing to know that The Learning Company still offers toll-free customer support and still packs disks in both PC formats — 3.5- and 5.25-inch — in each box.

Then again, how could you go wrong putting your child's learning (and play) time in the hands of a company whose very name has *TLC* built in?

The Learning Company, 6493 Kaiser Drive, Fremont, CA 94555, (800) 852-2255; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM, 640K RAM for Tandy 1000; DOS 2.0 or later; CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Roland sound boards; mouse optional; $59.95

SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE

By Mark Reynolds

What if? Those two words let you play with what-never-was, live in alternate worlds, and spot the crucial junctions of time. What if the South had won the Civil War? What if the Manhatten Project had failed, and the atomic bomb had never been made? What if Europeans had been booted out of the New World?

You can play "what if" with only your imagination, but a better way is to let your PC take you on journeys that never happened, or never will. Run a historically accurate simulation on your computer and you can explore the possibilities and improbabilites.

Try this "what if" on for size: What if German aeronautic engineers had sidestepped the blunders of the Nazi high command in time to put the world's most advanced combat aircraft into the skies to combat the Allied air armada? Would the Third Reich have survived?

Lucasfilm's Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe takes you on this what-if trip, putting you in charge of the daylight air campaign over Europe and letting you fly any of eight combat aircraft. As a what-if simulation, Secret Weapons works, but as a flight ⇨

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simulator, Secret Weapons simply needs some work.

Air War 1943

By combining both a demanding tactical puzzle and a sophisticated and challenging flight simulator, Secret Weapons hopes to draw both war gamers and PC pilots. You choose to fly for — and command — the U.S. Eighth Air Force or the German Luftwaffe from 1943, when the United States began its air war in earnest, to the German surrender in 1945.

On the American side, you can fly the classic P-47 Thunderbolt or P-51 Mustang fighters, or be pilot and crew for the formidable B-17 Flying Fortress bomber. As a German, you can choose the battle-proven and conventional Messerschmitt Bf-109 and Focke-Wulf FW-190 fighters, or, if you're a more daring pilot, the revolutionary Me-262 or Go-229 Flying Wing jet fighters, or the even more radical Me-163 Komet rocket plane.

Secret Weapons offers dazzling graphics, the kind of fast-paced action that tests your joystick skills, and brain-busting tactical challenges. You can fly single-objective missions; sign on for an extended *Tour of Duty*, just like a real pilot who had to put in a certain number of missions before he could retire from active duty; or, if you have the time, you can run an entire *Campaign*.

If you go for arcade-style flying action, single missions and an occasional tour of duty should keep you satisfied. But it's only when you conduct an entire campaign that the brilliance of Secret Weapons really shines. As Eighth Air Force or Luftwaffe commander, you direct and fly a series of missions beginning in the summer of 1943. Your accomplishments and losses affect the missions that follow. If, as the American commander, you successfully bomb German aircraft factories, for instance, fewer Luftwaffe fighters will greet you in later visits to German airspace.

The American commander must choose which targets to strike, then hit them; a German leader must decide which targets to defend, then manage that chore. Both organize their flight groups, assign them to airfields, give them orders, and then fly one of the planes. The German commander must also control war production, deciding whether to beef up the manufacture of conventional piston-engine fighters, or instead to build more jet fighters or rocket planes. The excellent manual offers a very readable historical overview that explains the strategies that the real commanders followed.

Hitler made a mistake by delaying production of such innovative aircraft as the Gotha Flying Wing jet fighter. Now you can find out what might have happened if the Germans had put a few more Go 229s in the air before 1945 — if you can handle the high speed.

The Big Picture Works

So, how much fun is Secret Weapons? A lot. This is one of those wonderful battle simulations you enter easily, then gradually work your way into increasing levels of complexity.

Flying your plane with joystick and fire button takes some practice — during a 500-mile-per-hour dive, it's tough to keep your gunsights trained on an enemy. Once such control becomes natural, though, you'll want to explore some of the game's other riches, learning more about each plane's performance and the tactics that keep it in the air. And you'll want to try a tour of duty to see if you can cut the mustard as a combat pilot.

Secret Weapons' complexity and variety are its strong suits. But it's this same complexity and wealth of graphics detail that make less than satisfactory on a basic machine — the less powerful your PC's processor, the more you'll notice this. Lucasfilm recommends a 286 machine; you'd best have a 386 for movement to flow smoothly. Even with a 386, controlling your plane is a little on the rough side. Distinguishing friend from foe isn't easy either, especially when that plane in the distance is but a cluster of flashing pixels. Though aircraft appear in impressive detail once they've closed on you, by that time it's really too late.

If you have a strategic bent and want to explore the what-if challenge of conducting the air war in Europe, Secret Weapons offers enough meat to satiate your gaming hunger for a long time. But if you're a vicarious pilot who loves to experience the joys of smooth, computer-simulated flight, you won't find Secret Weapons a satisfying feast.

Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe may be a great strategic and tactical simulation and what-if explorer, but it's not a great flight simulator.

Lucasfilm Games, P.O. Box 10307, San Rafael, CA 94912, (415) 721-3300; IBM PC or compatible; 80286 or faster, 640K RAM (768K for Tandy); EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster sound boards; mouse or joystick recommended; hard-disk drive recommended; $69.95

MARTIAN MEMORANDUM

By Wes Nihei

If you're a mystery buff, try this one on for size — Martian Memorandum from Access Software, an interactive whodunnit featuring the further adventures of Tex Murphy, San Francisco-based private eye in the year 2029. Tex made his début in Mean Streets, also from Access.

As in the earlier game, Martian Memorandum finds Tex trying to track down a missing heiress. This time, Marshall Alexander, president of the planet-shaping Terraform Corporation, is the bigwig who's missing a daughter, but the kidnappers have also snatched a valuable Martian artifact that's more important to him than his own flesh and blood. What the artifact is and who has abducted Alexander's daughter are the mysteries confronting Murphy — and you.

In addition to an intriguing storyline, Martian Memorandum features slick-looking graphics and top-notch sounds. The lush backgrounds, particularly the San Francisco scenes, are postcard perfect, and the other locales, including the Martian landscapes, are similarly picturesque. All characters are digitized images of real actors. They speak their lines in digitized voice synchronized with full-motion video, which gives the scenes a cinematic quality.

The game uses Access Software's proprietary compression techniques to pack the video and sound onto six floppies or 10 low-density 3.5-inch cassettes. It'll take up 1.2 megabytes of hard-disk space, although you'll need 7.2 megabytes free. The installation program itself is an easy-to-use, good-looking piece of work that engages you in a Mars trivia game as you set it up. (Quick — name a '60s sci-fi flick about Mars that starred Tommy Kirk and was voted one of the worst movies of all time.)

You play via a point-and-click interface (a mouse is highly recommended) consisting of a menu with eight standard RPG commands such as *Look*, *Move*, *Goto*, and *Talk*. Hints are available via a multilevel *Help* function, and you can save games to disk at any time. You also get a handy-dandy wrist communicator called a *Comlink*, which enables you to speak with your secretary, who manages a database of helpful information.

Searching rooms meticulously for clues and interrogating characters relentlessly are the name of this game. Tex encounters murder, deception, romance, and weird extraterrestrial prophecy as his investigation takes him through the streets of San Francisco to a smuggler's base in Central America and into the ruins of an ancient Martian civilization.

When you search rooms and crime scenes for clues, you play via a third-person perspective, side view. Click on almost any item or area in a room and a window appears on screen to indicate the object's importance, or lack thereof, to your investigation. Naturally, you'll collect a wealth of helpful items. You'll also encounter all ⇨

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manner of characters, from the glamorous to the grotesque. When you interrogate a suspect, the scene shifts to a close-up, face-to-face, first-person view. You can listen to the soundtrack and read the text in a dialogue box, while your possible responses appear on screen in separate boxes. Your skill at charting a conversation determines whether you uncover useful information or incur some no-holds-barred verbal or physical abuse.

And, as any PC P.I. knows, sleuthing requires brawn as well as brains. In Martian Memorandum you'll have to figure out how to break into assorted buildings and overcome physical dangers such as quicksand, booby traps, and Martian mobsters.

Following Footsteps

In the tradition of the great movie detectives such as Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade, Martian Memorandum drips with droll humor. You engage in smart-aleck repartée and toss out classic hard-boiled tough-guy lines. Some character names are oblique references to famous people, both fictional and real — such as aging movie star Nora Desmond, Mars magnate Lowell Percival, and police detective Mac Malden (Karl's distant relative, of course).

Mean Streets players should find Martian Memorandum familiar, but deeper and easier to play. Unlike Mean Streets, Martian Memorandum doesn't require you to master a polygon-graphics-based vehicle simulator to move around. Just click on *Travel* to appear instantaneously at a locale.

Mean Streets includes ten rooms to explore and 26 characters to interrogate, while Martian Memorandum features 40 large rooms and countless items to examine. Memorandum has fewer characters (23) than Mean Streets, but dialogue is richer. All the glitzy animation and digitized vocals aside, Martian Memorandum looks like a solid interactive mystery game. It's definitely a case worth investigating.

Access Software, 4910 West Amelia Earhart Drive, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (800) 800-4880; IBM PC or compatible; DOS 3.2, 530K RAM; VGA, MCGA; requires hard disk; supports SoundBlaster, AdLib, Roland, IBM Speech, MSound, RealSound sound boards; $59.95

TONY LARUSSA'S ULTIMATE BASEBALL

By Dan Muse

It's not unusual for a *PCGames* editor to become addicted to one game for a week or so; it's not often, however, that one game captivates the entire office the way Tony LaRussa's Ultimate Baseball has. When the digitized voice cries, "Play ball!" this game draws a crowd.

It's important to point out that most of us are baseball fanatics and that as we go to press with this issue, our beloved — if perennially disappointing — Red Sox are battling for first place in the American League Eastern Division. Still, Tony LaRussa's Ultimate Baseball offers an addicting mix of arcade action, managerial strategy, and even baseball history.

Play a Season or Just a Game

Tony LaRussa's Ultimate Baseball offers you the flexibility of playing a full 162-game season, a shortened 81-game schedule, round-robin tournaments, or a single winner-take-all game. One of the neat things about it is that although the package is named for the current manager of the Oakland As, the teams provided offer a fascinating mix of players from different eras. I'm a fan of Willie Mays, so I chose the Giants. (The game refers to them as the *San Francisco* Giants, but we know better — most of the players are from the New York Giants.)

Not only do I have Mays, Willie McCovey, Bobby "The Shot Heard 'Round the World" Thomson, Juan Marichal, and others from the great '50s and '60s teams, I also have Christie Mathewson, Bill Terry, Mel Ott, and other Giants greats from the 1890s through 1930s. The Tigers, Dodgers (we heard a rumor they moved out of Brooklyn), and Red Sox, among others, are also rich with baseball legends.

If you really want a stacked deck, though, take a look at the Bronx Bombers. Unless you hate the Yankees as much as we do, you may want to play a few games in pinstripes. The New York roster — Ruth, Gehrig, Ford, and so on — is so strong that Mickey Mantle either sits out or is the designated hitter.

As you encounter great players with asounding statistics, you may be moved to investigate further the careers of legends such as Rogers Hornsby and Ty Cobb. Tony LaRussa's Ultimate Baseball challenge covers my generation, my father's generation, and even my grandfather's generation of ballplayers. I can almost hear my father touting the greatness of Williams and DiMaggio as I attempt to counter (unsuccessfully) with tales of Jackson and Bench.

How You Play the Game

You can play with either keyboard or joystick; for most people, though, the joystick will work better. If you plan on two-player games, you should definitely have at least one joystick; the manual warns that although two people can play via the keyboard, the computer can interpret only one keystroke at a time.

You can play Tony LaRussa's Ultimate Baseball on three levels: *All-Star*, *Pro*, and *Rookie*. On the *All-Star* level, you control everything —

hitting, running, fielding, throwing; on the *Pro* level, you control everything but the fielding — that is, the computer makes the play, fields the grounders, judges and catches the fly balls, and so on. You still decide where to throw the ball as well as control the pitching and hitting. The only difference between the *Rookie* level and the *Pro* level is that in the former every pitch the computer throws is a strike, which helps you hone your batting technique. If you play on the *Rookie* level against a human opponent, though, you still don't know what pitch to expect.

Tony LaRussa's Ultimate Baseball offers a challenging combination of managerial strategy, arcade action, and sports history. Tailor the lineup to your liking, mixing players from different generations.

Regardless of the level you select, you make the managerial choices. The program gives you a default lineup, but you can change it to your liking. You should also keep an eye on your pitcher — if he starts to tire, you better get a reliever ready. You can't simply bring in a new pitcher; he has to warm up in the bullpen first. If you think your hurler is showing wear, you can have your pitching coach visit the mound and report back to you. Remember, though, on your second trip to the mound in the same inning, you must change pitchers. You also decide if and when to use pinch hitters. Given the depth of talent on some of these teams, you'll definitely want to work in some of your bench players.

Run, Hit, and Throw

The arcade elements are different from those in other baseball games. One of the most difficult aspects of any computer baseball game is judging and catching fly balls. This one takes an interesting approach. When a ball is hit into the air, a spotlight appears where the ball will land. The higher the ball is hit, the larger the spotlight. As the ball descends, the circle gets smaller. The trick is to have your fielder positioned in the center of the circle. Although this is an effective technique, it stills takes some getting used to. If you want to play at the *All-Star* level, you'll probably want to practice your fielding in a few exhibition games before you begin league play.

While fielding may not come naturally, running and hitting are intuitive and shouldn't take much practice even if this is your first computer baseball game. Although the *All-Star* level offers the biggest arcade challenge because you field for yourself, you'll probably find the *Pro* level the most enjoyable, especially if you're playing an entire season. You still control throwing, hitting, and pitching and you still make all the managerial decisions, but you won't blow close games because of a tiny twitch of the joystick.

2000 Games per Hour

If you want to play and manage during the playoffs and World Series, but don't want to play through a full 162-game schedule first, you can have the computer calculate the entire season in one to three hours, depending on the speed of your machine. Tony LaRussa's Ultimate Baseball provides 28 teams, so a complete season consists of 2268 games. You can watch the league standings change from day to day as your computer calculates the statistics; it's more fun than it sounds.

Tony LaRussa's Ultimate Baseball is as enjoyable as any computer baseball game available. Its arcade aspect is challenging, but not impossible to master. Its unique approach to fielding is at least commendable, if not revolutionary. An accessible and consistent interface lets you explore a variety of managerial options easily. On the totally intangible side, the game just has that baseball "feel" to it.

Here's a *PCGames* tip: Get together with three of your friends; have each person pick a division (National League West, for example). Have the computer simulate a season. (For a little extra fun, take a look at the various rosters and try to predict the division winners.) Then play the playoffs and World Series over a couple of weekends. Hot dogs, peanuts, and beer are optional, but highly recommended. ❑

Strategic Simulations Inc., 675 Almanor Avenue, Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086-2901, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC, AT, PS/2, or Tandy; 10MHz AT or faster recommended; 640K RAM, VGA, EGA, MCGA; requires hard-disk drive and high-density 1.2-megabyte disk drive (also available on 3.5-inch 720K disks); supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Roland sound cards; off-disk copy protection; $49.95 ➪

TWO NEW TURTLE
THEIR OWN

The four, the proud, the green are armed and ready for action in exclusive new missions.

Manhattan will never be the same again. Shredder is bent on taking over. Today Manhattan, tomorrow the world! So he's infested the borough with a swarm of walking, stalking slime balls and sinister traps. The turtles are the town's only hope, so they must gear up to battle Shredder and his no good hoods in this exclusive new action/adventure.

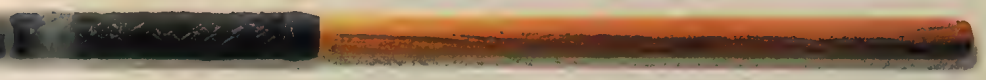
Enlist the ninja know-how of Leonardo, Raphael, Michaelangelo or Donatello and put their distinct character attributes of strength, speed and energy to the test in 15 challenging missions. Two turtles can even join forces to tangle as a team in a danger zone that stretches from sewers and subways to warehouse hideouts and treacherous rooftops. You'll have to dare them all to round up clues and slice it up in the real time fight sequences before time runs out.

Training sessions with ninja master Splinter, combat, pizza and sleep are all needed to reach maximum turtle potential. Throughout your quest, the 3-D mapping system will dim and crumble to reflect the status of your mission. Side and 3/4 perspectives give you a keen view of the madness on every mission.

Manhattan is plunging toward catastrophe, so grab your best weapon and check out the latest turtle escapade. Chop-chop!

Available Fall 1991 for MS-DOS.

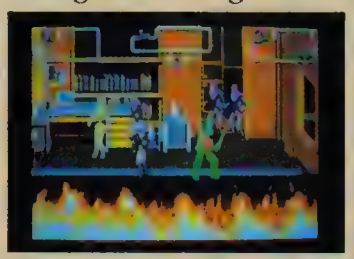
GAMES COME WITH HARDWARE.

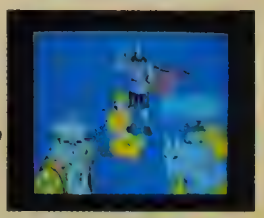


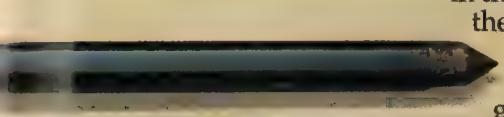
Point-blank from the original arcade game — they came, they saw, they ate pizza.

The green team is pumped up and ready for action now that Shredder's gotten his mitts on ace news reporter April O'Neil and ninja master Splinter. The perfect bait to lure the noble ninja crew into a danger filled rescue mission that'll leave you shaking in your shell and asking for seconds.

All eight challenging levels come to you straight from the original arcade game and are teeming with Shredder's toughest reptilian resistance yet, including 700 Taekwondo turtle terminators and a new more merciless breed of Foot Soldiers. But you don't have to go it alone in the cold, cruel world. Two turtle comrades can team up to simultaneously slice and dice Shredder's forces. Brave Vinnie's Valet "Stalking" Lot, the Soho Sewer System and the Rock-A-Fella Expressway as you master side kicks, flying kicks, somersaults, flips and foot sweeps to greet an onslaught of Mousers, laser armed robots and more of the mindless muscle-bound gang. You'll even have a jet-powered skateboard to speed your assault at one stage of the game. The final showdown takes place in the ultimate criminal lair, the Technodrome.

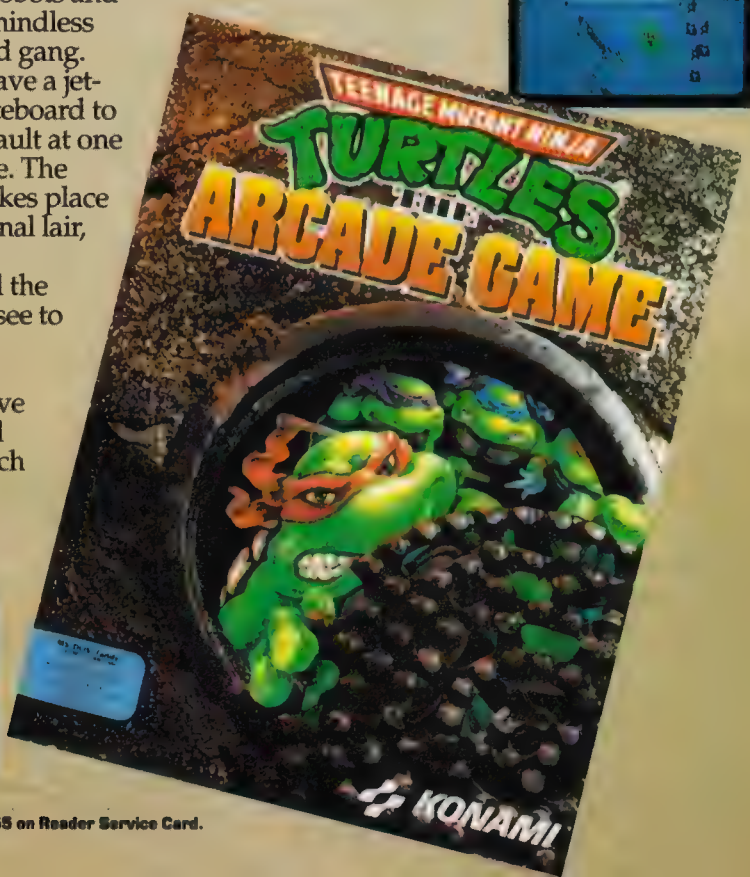






Gobble up all the pizza you can see to gain extra bonus points. Get up as much strength as possible because you've got to prove that you're more than just a stuffed shell. See for yourself just how much turtle you can be.

Available Fall 1991 for MS-DOS, Amiga and C64.



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They tracked down the lost dialogue, and realized orichalcum would yield them the ultimate weapon of the age.

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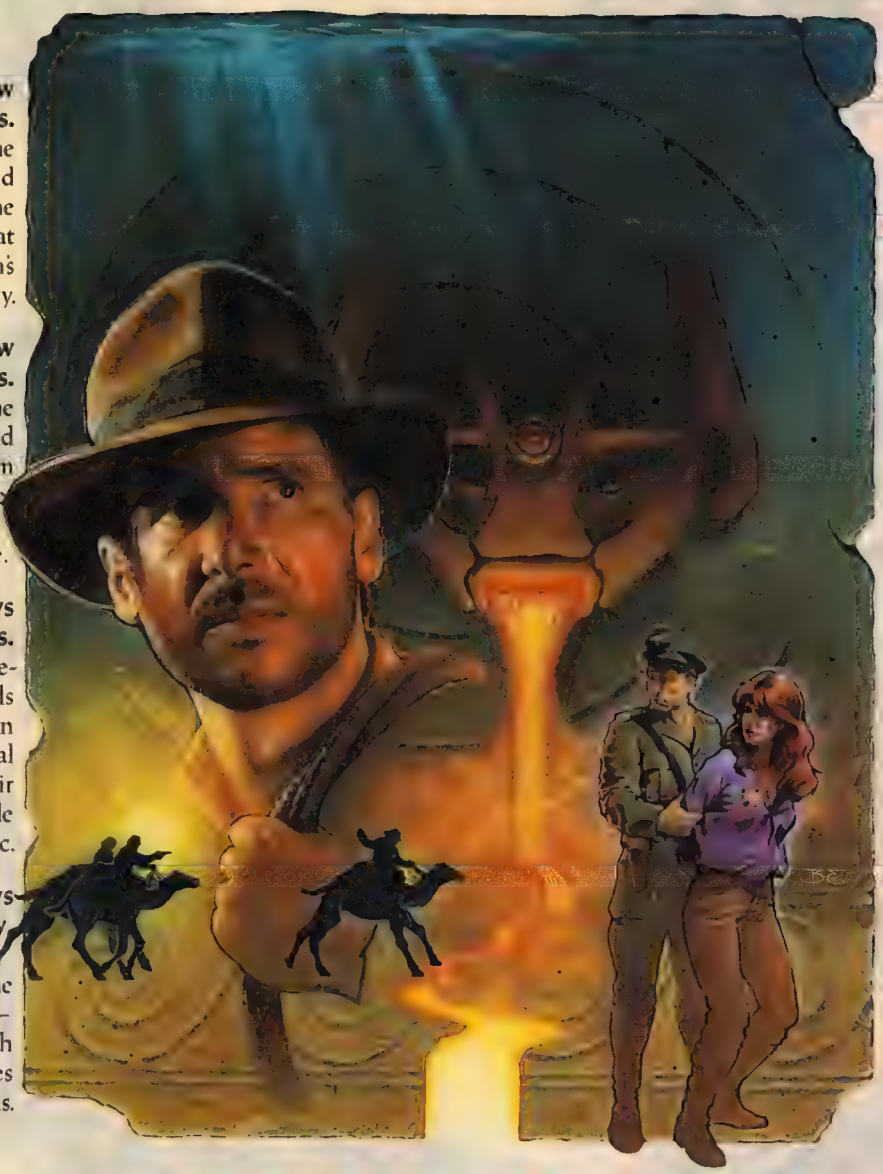
Everyone knows but Indy.
And he's got to learn fast. The Nazis are one step ahead of him — from Iceland to North Africa to the Azores to... Atlantis.



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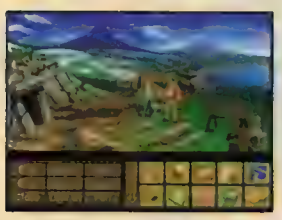

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PLAYING THE GAME

Thrill of Victory

By Neil Shapiro

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT — COMbat and competition in all their glorious variety keep PC gamers coming back for more. Whether you're watching futuristic alien wars on your computer monitor or today's football battles on your TV screen, we've got a couple of packages this month that'll fit right into your winter viewing schedule.

Here Kitty, Kitty!

Sequels often aren't quite as impressive as the original event. Whether you're talking about a movie or a software program, a sequel may simply extend what happened before without breaking any new ground. The best sequels, though, add surprising new touches, show the same level of fervor and dedication as the original, and shine with their own light.

One good example is Origin's **Wing Commander II**. After a couple of days battling through the hostile universe of the Kilrathi wars, I'm convinced that this sequel is every bit as good as the first installment. Indeed, it fixes up a few of Wing Commander's rough spots.

The sequel's plot revolves around your attempt ten years after the end of Wing Commander to prove that you're neither an unstable pilot nor a traitor. To do that, you'll have to fly many a combat mission against those nasty kittens, the Kilrathi.

Wing Commander II offers more ships than the original game, and some are much more capable. The Broadsword, for example, has left, right, and rear turrets so that you can fire at enemies coming at you from all directions.

The animation is intense, and the game makes even better use of cinematic techniques between scenes than the first program did. For instance, instead of issuing repetitive reports on the carrier deck to a superior officer, Wing Commander II often works the reports into normal conversation between you and a cast of well-presented nonplayer characters.

Although Chris Roberts, the game's designer, insists that there are just a few more NPCs, I have a hard time believing him. The new characters are very real, well fleshed out. Rather than simply clicking on a person in a bar, for example, and listening to what he or she has to say, you'll participate in the storyline's simulation of all sorts of conversational techniques and gambits.

But there's more to Wing Commander II than just talk — it's got some of the smokingest, fastest, most mind-boggling, most eye-boggling, most challenging nonstop animated firefights that this Rapier pilot has ever seen on his VGA display.

In many ways the fighting is similar to that in the original game, but with even better animation. Indeed, many of the same tactics you developed for use in Wing Commander I will stand you in good stead with the sequel.

But there are a number of new techniques to learn as well — flying the Broadsword ship, for instance, with its four firing positions (out the cockpit and from the rear, left, and right turrets).

Chris Roberts mentioned that he was trying to simulate sort of a "big bomber like a B-52," but in space, and that's truly the effect. Fly up on a Kilrathi target, for example, and then quickly loop so that it's within sight of your rear or side turret. You'll find using the rear turret magnificent once you get used to the in-the-mirror method of lining up a target that's behind you.

But the difficult part of flying a Broadsword is trying to take out a Kilrathi capital ship. The capital ships have shields you can't blow up with missiles, and they also fire flak like crazy. To take out a capital ship, you have to go on a torpedo run, and that's the hardest thing to execute. Getting this one right will be the despair of new pilots.

Take heart — here's some advice from Steve Beeman, one of the project's software engineers: "The torpedo run is the hardest part of the game. While the Broadsword has lots of shields, it doesn't have afterburners, so there's no way to get out quickly.

"Start off at zero speed at a maximum range from your target (a capital ship) of about 10,000. Set up and lock your crosshairs. Switch to your turrets. Get your wingman to help you out with the fighters that tend to attack.

"Once lock is complete, boost to a full speed of 360 and fly in. The flak will get heavier and heavier. Stay at max range of the torpedo to preserve your shield, but you must still move in to between 1000 and 2000. Then launch. Turn straight around and get out!"

Your chances of hitting the target with a torpedo vary with your distance from the target when you release the weapon. Within 2000, you'll almost always score a hit. Five thousand out adds up to about a 50-50 chance.

You'll discover new things on Wing Commander II's other ships as you go along. For example, the new Sabre

ship has the power of a good ol' Rapier, plus a rear turret and a torpedo. Fly it like a Rapier, but your turret is equipped with a particle cannon you can fire for a long, hard time. Make full use of it.

Also, depend on your wingmen much more then you did in the previous game. According to Roberts, these guys are "smarter, with quicker reactions, and they use the same abstract intelligence routines as the Kilrathi fighters." So don't be afraid to let your buddies fight some of your battles for you in this one.

After finally arriving at the end, I have to agree with Roberts and Beeman that "the last scenario is pretty cool." It's a powerful dogfight that I guarantee you'll never forget as long as you can hold a joystick. We're talking *intense*.

Here's an interesting point: The game's difficulty factor is guided by a series of dynamic intelligence routines. After every mission, the game adjusts itself to more challenge or less, depending on how you did. It's never a cakewalk, but for most players it's not impossible, either. So keep plugging away — that final firefight is in sight.

To help you along in your mission, we've included a special map (see the accompanying **Figure**) showing routes to the game's various star systems (each composed of three missions). Note that there are "good" and "bad" paths. For example, in systems 2, 4, and 6 there's no way to get to a "bad" system; you may not want to spend a lot of time replaying missions in those systems. On the other hand, many systems are critical and if you do poorly will take you to the losing endgame; those are the ones you'll want to keep playing until you get them right.

The chart also lists which ships fly in each system and who the wingman is for each series of missions. There's no way to simply choose a system or a mission, but, still, the chart will help you plan your gaming sessions.

We played an almost-ready-for-prime-time pre-release version, and about the only things it didn't have were the optional speech routines that will be sold separately and that will require a Sound Blaster board. If the rest of the game is any indication, they should be dynamite.

So what's left for Wing Commander III to do? Quite a bit, as it turns out. Roberts reports that Origin is developing new technology just for this upcoming game — and it'll feature the final defeat of the Kilrathi Empire. "I think it'll blow some people away!" says Roberts. You'll be able to swoop over planetary terrain, and the huge capital ships will be drawn in astonishing new detail — you'll be able to fly close and feel their immensity.

Meanwhile, as you wait for the third installment, you should certainly be able to amuse yourself with Wing Commander II. One final tip: After you win the last scenario, don't switch off your PC. Wait for the credits to roll by on screen and pay close attention for a special surprise.

Figure. Star-system routes in Wing Commander II.

SERIES	WINGMAN	SHIP TYPE
1	Shadow	Ferret
2	nobody	Ferret/B.S.
3	Hobbes	Rapier
4	Doomsday	Broadsword
5	Spirit	Epee/Sabre
6	Stingray	Rapier
7	Angel	Broadsword
8	Jazz	Sabre
9	nobody	Ferret/B.S.
10	Doomsday	Broadsword
11	Stingray	Rapier
12	Jazz	Sabre

Monday Night Dream Come True

It's that time of year — when I spend my weekends glued to the TV watching football. From opening kickoff to the Super Bowl, millions of Americans know more about their favorite quarterback then they do about the president of the United States. But somehow it seems you just never really know enough about your team.

Statistics always interest sports fans. Sometimes it's for betting reasons (whether a friendly office pool or a Vegas trip), but usually it's just for the pure fun of trying to forecast

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events yourself — to help you decide whom to root for and to get a better understanding of why teams play the way they do.

Well, there's not a PC-owning NFL football fan in the world who should be without **Pro Football Analyst**, from Villa Crespo Software. Once you've used it I think you'll agree that doing without it would be like watching *ABC Monday Night Football* with the picture turned off. The program is that good.

Although PFA can help you bet (and it even has routines that let you compare your numbers with the Las Vegas "line" or your local lines), it's really the world's handiest way to compare football statistics among teams. The database included in the package covers the 1989–1990 season. When you purchase the program, call or write Villa Crespo to get a disk of current statistics.

Of course, you can also enter all figures manually, and there's a modem line you can call each week to download new figures. (The company also offers ongoing disk and modem subscriptions.)

I've found that although the manual explains PFA's features well, it doesn't quite give you a game plan for putting it all together. Here's what I've been doing through the first weeks of the season.

First, you'll want to load the database, probably using figures from the preceding season. Then choose to analyze the four performance-handicapping formulas included — they're demos to help you "roll your own" system for predicting game outcomes. While Villa Crespo doesn't vouch for the accuracy of the formulas, analysis shows that some of them do pretty well week to week. Sooner or later you'll start designing your own (more on that below). Meanwhile, begin by applying each formula to past games similar to the current one you want to investigate.

Once you've decided on a formula, call in the game you want to predict by using the matching-up-teams option (the *Detailed Predictions* choice on the *Predict* menu); you'll get a score prediction.

Now go to the *Set Formula* choice and juggle the formulas about. Sometimes they'll agree on the winner and even come close on point spread. That's a piece-of-cake result.

But odds are (excuse the pun) you'll get conflicting results from different formulas. At worst, they'll disagree on who wins; at best on point spread. The program's *Trends* feature comes in handy here: The *Trends* menu contains a number of choices that let you examine statistics in depth to help you understand the predictions better and perhaps come to a synthesis in your own mind, taking all the program's information into account.

The *Trends* screens lets you see quickly how the team you're examining has done in the past against all opponents, how they do as home and away favorites, as underdogs, and so on. Using information on team trends is what lets you — a football fan with a human brain — work together with your silicon-brained PC.

To delve further into things, you'll want to examine the raw statistics as well. You can look at almost 30 different statistics for each team and compare them quickly with other teams'. Want to know how many sack yards the '49ers have and how they compare with Minnesota's? First downs? Rushing yards? Rushing attempts? Penalties? Penalty yards? It's all here in complete, exacting, wonderful detail.

And, thanks to the PC, we're not talking about leafing lifelessly through a paperback book. PFA presents the data as a series of dynamic screens that can change as fast as you want, zeroing in on what you want to see and bringing the numbers to life.

Sooner or later, you'll want to try to edit your own formulas. PFA's manual recommends you start by modifying the included formulas. Decide what you think is significant. If you feel ball control is important, for instance, then you'll give greater weight to variables such as fumbles. If you think passing is important, you'll weight passing yards more heavily than rushing yards.

Don't forget to check your new formula with the program's *Analyze Formula* routines to get a quick report on how your formula would do for all past games you want to try it on.

The more you use Pro Football Analyst this season, the better you'll get at making predictions for next season. To all my fellow armchair quarterbacks, I don't know of any way to understand this sport better than to use PFA on a game-by-game basis. It's fourth and one — and I say go for it! ❑

Send your hints, tips, and techniques to Neil Shapiro, P.O. Box 520, Bethpage, NY 11714.

Product Information

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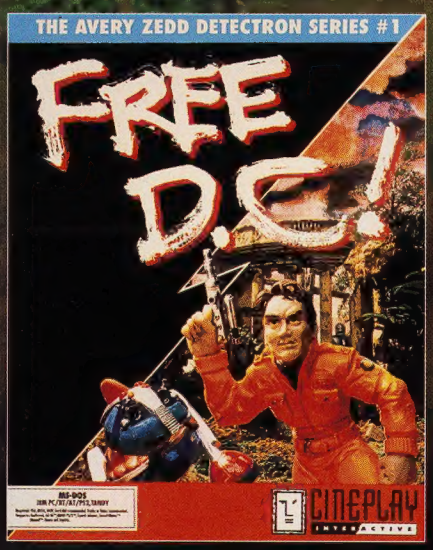

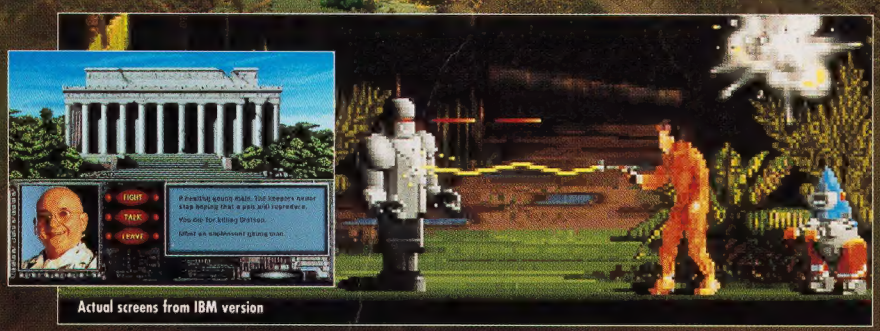

Actual screens from IBM version

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